PLAIN ANSWERS TO RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS MODERN MEN ARE ASKING

SAMUEL CHARLES BLACK, D.D.

With love and best
Wishes from Mother
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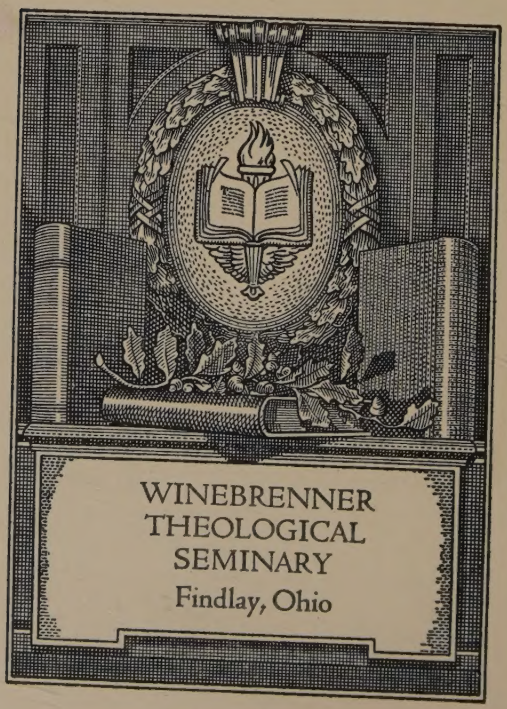

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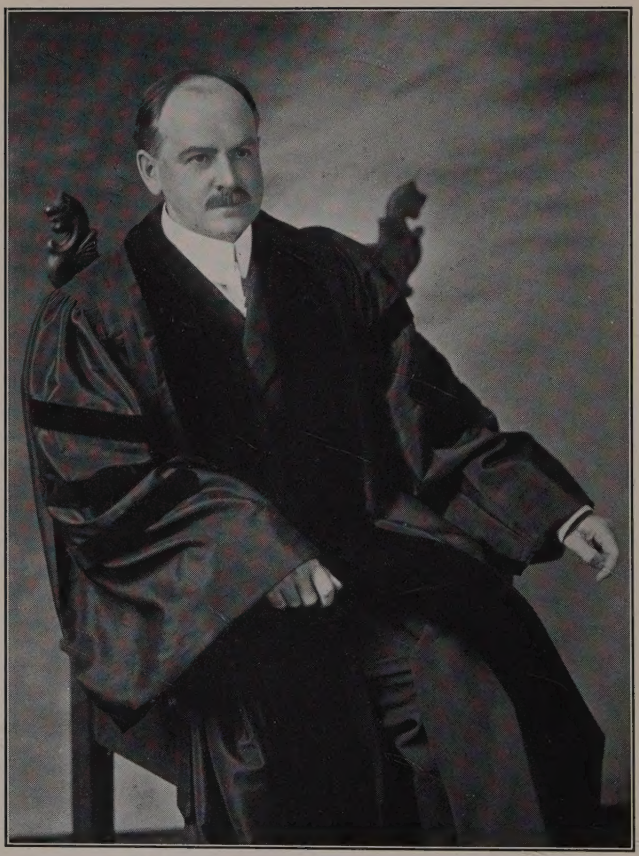

Very Sincerely Yours

Samuel Charles Black

PLAIN ANSWERS TO RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

MODERN MEN ARE ASKING

BY

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ABOUT WHAT FOLLOWS

For a dozen years the writer of the following chapters has been laying special emphasis in his ministry on the winning of men to Jesus Christ. His greatest difficulty,—a difficulty doubtless common to all other Christian workers,—has been to get them to think about the matter seriously, to consider honestly the beauty of Christ's character and the reasonableness of his claims upon them. When they have hesitated, he has found that the questions troubling them were very old ones, the simplest and most obvious questions that arise in the contemplation of Christianity. Having vainly sought in the writings of others for brief, plain answers to these simple questions, he has from time to time prepared the following chapters, often to meet a particular case. For many they have cleared the way. They are now brought together and presented in book form with the hope that they may render a larger service to Christ.

It will be seen at once that they are not intended to be exhaustive or technical. Theological intricacies have been studiously avoided, while at the same time the author has sought to keep well within the boundaries of evangelical doctrine. Space is given to many illustrations which, it is believed, will assist the mind. The chapters are so subdivided as to elucidate particular points. They have been made as brief also as was deemed consistent with clearness.

It may be observed that the answers overlap in a few cases. These duplications have been allowed to remain, because, in some instances, the repetition of a statement already made was necessary fully to answer the question under consideration, in case the chapter was being read alone, and, in others, it was felt that the repetition of a truth, in slightly different form, might help conviction.

The author believes the largest service of the book will be to honestly inquiring men who are willing to be convinced, and he hopes that pastors and evangelists will find it valuable as a working document.

With a devout prayer that the "Answers" may be in harmony with the mind and will of Him in whose honor and for whose cause they were prepared, they are thus sent forth.

S. C. B.

Boulder, Colorado, *June,* 1910.

INTRODUCTION

The world is always interested in the man who sympathizes with honest inquiry. The honest inquirer is always interested in the man who has an answer to his question, at least to the extent of discovering whether the answer satisfies. Many have found light who are not able to point others to the way of light. In this earnest book Dr. Black has revealed the gifts of a helpful teacher. He has gathered the old questions, appreciating that human nature is a constant quality throughout the years; yet with a marked freshness that carries the reader along by apt illustration and convincing argument. He puts the question plainly each time, so that any man who may have used it as an excuse for inaction will be inclined to read the answer.

Our age has realized such a widespread intelligence as to revolutionize the place of the minister. He does not seek so much to say some new thing, as to put the old truth in some new phase so as to arrest the attention of men who are drifting, more or less indifferently, into the familiar currents of business cares and worldly pleasures. Our author has done this. Realizing the world's need to be not so much more light as more sight and insight, he brings these factors to the help of the inquiring mind. Long ago one wrote out of experience: "Then shall we know when we follow on to know." He had caught a vision

which had arrested his thought long enough to lead him to look a second time, and the desire to press his inquiry developed into a purpose not to be satisfied until he possessed the truth. This book is calculated to quicken an attitude of this sort as the reader begins to peruse its pages.

The method used in the argument is striking. In a very effective way the author lifts the Bible to its unique place as the first book of the world, showing it to be worthy of the faith which it has inspired in the lives of all who have honestly studied its pages. Logically he then proceeds to give its teachings regarding the supreme problems of victorious character-building as the final solution of these problems, reinforcing the teachings with illustration and proof from nature, history and experience.

A candid man cannot fail to find help in these brief but cogent chapters. Since they are at once concise and clear, the author will find many inclined to read his discussion who might hesitate to take up a more elaborate volume. The book should prove of special interest to busy men, who will be led to pass it on to others in testimony of its helpfulness.

HOWARD AGNEW JOHNSTON.

HONEST INQUIRY AND ITS BENEFITS TO MEN

Plain Answers to Religious Questions

I

HONEST INQUIRY AND ITS BENEFITS TO MEN

Shall We Ask Questions?

The most hopeful sign in any language is the interrogation point. Let a man cease to make inquiry of his own soul, of men or books or things, and he ceases to progress. The men and women in whom mind and soul growth has stopped, who are making no progress from year to year, are the men and women who no longer ask questions. Honest inquiry is like fuel, for it keeps the flame of mental and spiritual life alive. Men who have ceased to grow elicit our pity. They are like gravestones: not men—but merely marks, showing where once living men now rest. Age in no way interferes with mind and soul growth, most often it is conducive to it, for it brings time for both inquiry and meditation.

Consider Well Before Judging.

Before men properly enter into any realm they first find out about it. Only " fools rush in where angels

fear to tread." When about to enter the realm of letters, worthy men ask its nature—what are its requirements? what its compensations? Music is inviting, but let him who would enter its portals first discover its exactions. How many hours and years must be given to ceaseless practice? what restrictions will there be as to muscular labor? what returns may be rightly expected? When about to enter an unknown country, the wise traveler first studies his map, that he may avoid its dangerous places, find its safe and beautiful spots, and lose no time in his journeyings.

It is not a sign of superiority when men neglect or refuse to inquire into the claims of Christianity, whether it be from indifference or from a willingness to accept the whole system as presented by the Fathers. Christians should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in them, and no man has any right to reject so great a force in the world as Christianity until he has exhaustively considered all the facts concerning it. Further than this, if one already in the church has doubts or misgivings that rob him of supreme contentment and satisfaction in his Lord, he had best own up to them, and, in a spirit of honest inquiry, search the Scriptures and consider all other evidence, that his doubts may be removed. Christianity courts full investigation: not partial, for partial inquiry, which simply uncovers difficulties, may prove to be like a little learning, "a dangerous thing." Investigation should go to the end, and consider all the evidence. There need be no fear but that the honest investigator will turn from his task as did the

once doubting Thomas, saying, "My Lord and my God."

Investigate Christianity Before Entering.

Let no man rush without thought into a Christian profession. The ancient applicant asked, "What shall I do?" and the learned sage of Jerusalem sought the Master by night, that in quietness and at length, he might make inquiry concerning the Way of life. His example is valuable and may well be studied by the men and women of this restless age.

Who Nicodemus Was.

Israel was a theocracy. God was its only king; the sacred writings its only law. The Sanhedrin, its governing body, had charge of both civil and religious affairs. Nicodemus, as a member of the Sanhedrin, was one of the first seventy men in the nation. His position would be even more exalted than that of a United States senator to-day. The coming of Nicodemus to Christ would be as if the Governor of New York or of Pennsylvania should seek an interview with the greatest religious teacher of the day, to talk of his own personal salvation.

Let us at once dispel the idea that we are too brainy or too prosperous to come to Jesus and make inquiry about the Way of life. The greatest man that ever lived on earth was, morally and spiritually, a pygmy compared with Jesus Christ.

Are you a lawyer, high in your profession, beginning to think it would belittle you to make inquiry of

your spiritual guides concerning the Way of life? The greatest lawyers of Israel stood in awe of Jesus, as the officers sent to take him; but returning empty handed said: "Never man so spake."

Are you a doctor, skillful and keen, successful and happy, and do you feel that it would not do now for you to make honest inquiry about the Way of life? Jesus Christ has healed more men and women than you will ever see; he is the Great Physician who heals all the hurt hearts of the world.

You are not too old, young man, to come in humbleness and find out how to live. The Christ from whom you inquire was with God at the creation of the universe.

And you, young woman, busy with earth's joys and hopes, may well learn that there are more ways than one to be happy, and that the way of Jesus may be better than the one you have chosen.

Some Are Lost Unnecessarily.

In late colonial days a young woman of noble birth became separated from a hunting party with which she had gone forth for the day. Through new and unbroken country she urged on her spirited horse in the hope that she would soon overtake her companions; but, as they had turned aside from the proposed course, every moment but took her farther from them. Conscious at last that she was lost, she turned to seek her own plantation home. Hours of riding brought no familiar sight. Any one of a score of negroes she passed with haughty mien could have

put her on the right road in a moment; but she was too proud to acknowledge she was lost and seek direction. Night came, and with it hunger and cold, but still she rode on—determined not to ask a common wayfarer the road to her father's house. She was saved at last only by a searching party, which, following her and making inquiry of every passer-by, finally overtook her.

A Word in Defense of the Inquirer.

Careless readers in every age have criticised Nicodemus for coming to Jesus by night. They say that it was cowardly, that it showed weakness of character, that it was unworthy of one who would seek the benefits of Christianity. But let them remember that it is infinitely better to come to Jesus by night than not to come at all, and also let them remember the old saying, "Discretion is the better part of valor." Many a "goods-box philosopher" to-day who never smelled powder finds fault with the boys of 'sixty-one for preserving themselves in time of danger. One can usually silence such by asking them if they are willing to go out on the hillside and let a thousand men with army muskets shoot at them!

Many good reasons why it was best for this member of the Sanhedrin to visit Jesus by night may be suggested:

Recognizing Nicodemus as a man of authority, whose influence would be great, and the importance of his understanding everything aright, Jesus may have suggested the evening visit in order that time might be

given to the conversation. Or, the duties of Nicodemus may have occupied him so fully during the day that the evening was the only hour he had. An explanation even more probable is that Nicodemus understood well the feeling toward Jesus and knew that it would serve the purpose of both better if the important talk were private.

The important thing about the visit of Nicodemus is not the hour at which he came to Jesus, but that he came at all. I care not at what hour of the day or night you go to Jesus to inquire about the Way of life, but I am anxious that you go at some hour, for he alone has the words of eternal life, and the words that will help you most in living a righteous life here.

Antecedents to a Mountain View.

If you would gain inspiration from the magnificent view from the top of Pike's Peak the important thing is not that you go up the mountain on the cog road, by carriage, on burrow-back, or on foot; whether you make the trip before the storm in the morning, after it in the afternoon, or by moonlight at night. The one thing necessary, if you would have this wonderful view, which can never be forgotten, is that in some way, at some hour in a certain twenty-four, you reach the summit.

Nicodemus, member of the Sanhedrin, a ruler of the Jews, a man of power and influence, came to Jesus Christ; he turned from labor, forgot his pride, took the risk of discovery and punishment and came into the presence of Jesus. It was a splendid show of

"strength of character, of unprejudiced desire for the truth, of earnestness and honesty of purpose." Contact with Jesus is the main thing. Touch him and you are lifted.

The Principle Illustrated.

Wise parents desire that their boys and girls come in contact with men who have world visions, who see things in the large, who are able to communicate their spirit, for they know that this is worth more than all the book-learning in the world. Garfield expressed this idea perfectly when he said that all the university he needed was a fallen log with Mark Hopkins on one end and himself on the other.

Touch the hem of His garment. Therein lie healing and strength. No man has a right to reject Jesus as Lord until he has been in such close contact with him that his mighty force, like that of the dynamo in touch with the storage battery, has a chance to flow into him. Then, I dare assert, he will never want to reject him.

"Thou Art a Teacher Come from God."

When we seek information concerning any realm we must have perfect confidence in the ability and authority of the one to whom we go to inquire. Most men allow themselves to be influenced in religious matters by those least able to give information. It is not so in any other realm. A few years ago, in the notorious Leutgert trial in Chicago, the lawyers, wanting testimony concerning certain bones suspected to be human, sent to the Field Museum and called from

his work Dr. Dorsey, one of the best posted men in his realm in the world. Why did they not call in some quick-witted, sharp-tongued newspaper man? Because they wanted the truth from a man whose knowledge and character were unimpeachable. When we seek information about life, here and hereafter, we should be at least equally exacting.

Nicodemus Readily Acknowledged What Many Men To-day Deny.

How did Nicodemus know that Jesus was a teacher sent from God? He himself answers: "For no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him." Evidently he had seen him heal the sick, cast out devils, raise the dead, live a righteous life in a corrupt age. Now we see the value of Christ's miracles, his wonderful teaching, his matchless example. Nicodemus, living when Christ lived, seeing him work, hearing him speak, believed many of the things men to-day have come to doubt. Perhaps he was present at the wedding at Cana and saw the limpid water blush into wine at the command of its Master. He may have been at Nain when Jesus gave the young man back from the waiting bier to his widowed mother's arms. Perhaps he stood outside the tomb at Bethany, and saw the stone removed and Lazarus come forth after four days' burial.

At any rate, Nicodemus, a contemporary of Jesus, who talked with him at length, and knew all he was doing and saying, said: "We know that thou art a teacher come from God."

What Nicodemus Found Out.

And here is the word the Teacher spoke to Nicodemus:

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

What! Nicodemus had said nothing about entrance into the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, that is Jesus' answer. That is all he teaches about; how men may enter the kingdom of God. Men ask him about work on the Sabbath. He shifts their thoughts to the more important question of the kingdom of God. They ask him to settle a dispute. That is not his business; he came to show men the way to heaven. Certain Greeks simply ask to see him. He is reminded that his earthly work is nearly done: "For this cause came I unto this hour." One supreme object absorbed him, and, touch him where men would, he had nothing but illuminating words on the subject of salvation and eternal life.

Hear him in his matchless utterance: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." You cannot enter the realm of the Spirit by studying natural science any more than you can enter the realm of instrumental music by studying astronomy. Just as you had to be born into the realm of the flesh so you must be born into the realm of the Spirit. Hard to understand? Why, it cannot be understood by men, Nicodemus, yet it cannot be denied. "The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it

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cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Men cannot understand this, Nicodemus, but just as surely as the wind, which you cannot see, bows down the trees it blows against, just so surely does the Spirit, whom you cannot see, lift up the men whose lives he enters.

The Word of an Expert.

John Ruskin's fine word with reference to entrance into the spirit and atmosphere of the noble company of Book-writers of past ages illustrates the thought.

"The place you desire and the place you fit yourself for is open to labor and to merit; but to nothing else. No wealth will bribe, no name overawe, no artifice deceive, the guardian of those Elysian gates. In the deep sense, no vile or vulgar person ever enters there. At the portières of that silent Faubourg St. Germain, there is but one brief question:

"'Do you deserve to enter? Pass.'

"There is no graduation day, there are no orations, there is no diploma. When by long communion with them and meditation, you have become spirit of their spirit, you are in their realm and the moment of passing the boundary line is, perhaps, unknown to you."

"So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Transformation by the Spirit.

"The Spirit's methods," says Professor Phelps in "The New Birth," "we cannot know, but the facts of

the new life are as plain and certain as that the strong wind bends the forest trees. We may not know the day nor the hour when we are born again, but we may know the facts by the fruits, as we know not how life works in a peach tree, but that it does work is proved by the peaches that grow on it. When Coleridge said, 'By what manner of working God changes a soul from evil to good, how he impregnates the barren rock with gems and gold, is to the human mind an impenetrable mystery, in all cases alike,' he uttered only what every thoughtful mind feels. But this is very far from affirming that the change itself, the result of God's workings, is an enigma. A change of character, in itself considered, is one of the most intelligible of historic facts. In the new birth the supreme inclination of the affections is changed. A converted man thinks, reasons, remembers, imagines, now; and he did all these before conversion. A regenerate heart feels, desires, loves, hates now; and it did all these before. But the chief objects of thought, of love, of hatred, are changed; they are revolutionized. It is the most radical change of which human character is susceptible. It is a change from sin to holiness."

The Briar That Blossomed.

And here is a story from Mark Guy Pearce that will help us also:

"There was once a briar growing in a ditch and there came along a gardener with his spade. As he dug around it and lifted it out the briar said to itself: 'What is he doing that for? Doesn't he know that I

am only an old, worthless briar?' But the gardener took it into the garden and planted it amid the flowers, while the briar said: 'What a mistake he has made! Planting an old briar like myself among such rose trees as these?' But the gardener came once more and with a keen-edged knife made a slit in the briar, and (as we say in England) 'budded it' with a rose, and by and by, when summer came, lovely roses were blooming on that old briar. Then the gardener said, 'Your beauty is not due to that which came out of you; but to that which I put into you.'"

New Possibilities in an Old Life.

It should be well understood by everyone that, silent and unseen as it is, what makes the birth of the Spirit discernible is that, once born into its realm, new and vast possibilities open before the young child. The life of the Spirit, in its outward manifestations, is singularly like the life of the body: the desire to live is strong; hunger is keen; growth is possible. Embracing these possibilities, the soul, born from above, enters upon its larger life. Emphasis is shifted from material to spiritual things and the newborn son, in confidence and great hope starts on the long, sure journey to his Father's house. Other men who inquire as Nicodemus did, will find out the same things and life for them will begin anew.

A Friend, Not an Enemy.

Honest inquiry then, is one of man's greatest friends. Our fathers feared its revelations, but we

have come to love them for they have given us new visions of our Lord. One has a deep conviction that the best thing he can say to the souls to whom he speaks, especially to any who may not know Him is: "Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near."

Ask about him. Inquire about his kingdom, his way of life. Read the unique Book that tells us about him. Be sure, in your inquiry, to consult reliable sources. Talk with men whose character is unimpeachable, whose knowledge and experience make their words worth listening to and weighing.

Nicodemus, one of the foremost scholars of his day, one of the first seventy men of his nation; a master of reasoning and understanding, studied everything he could lay his hands upon that told about Jesus, watched his deeds as he went among men, then came and had a long, quiet talk with him, and went away a firm believer and a devout follower. As you follow the example of Nicodemus, may it please God to give you his experience.

HOW MAY I KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

II

HOW MAY I KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

The First Great Necessity.

This question takes precedence over all others in the realm of man's religious life. He must have a firm foundation. Without this a religious character that will stand against the insidious temptations of the age is an impossibility. In every man's religious life there must be some point to which he can go back with absolute confidence and say, "All other things may be doubtful, but this I believe unshakably and eternally." If you are unable to accept the miraculous element in the Gospels, then you must go back of that. If you are not sure concerning the immaculate conception of our Lord, you must go back of that. If you doubt some of the statements in the Old Testament, you must go back of them, continually asking yourself the question, "What do I absolutely believe, whereupon I can stand without the shadow of a doubt crossing my mind?" Unless a man can go back thus and say with a confidence which all the argument in the world cannot shake, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," a stable religious structure is an impossibility. When the existence of God is absolutely believed, there is a foundation for future building. So the question, "How may I know there

is a God," takes precedence over all other religious problems, and, properly, comes early in this series of questions and answers.

In our courts, the attorney for the state is not compelled to prove the defendant absolutely guilty. If he would secure a verdict of guilty, it is only necessary to remove all reasonable doubt; when this has been successfully done, he may demand the verdict for which he has contended. It will be impossible for us to prove the existence of God by physical demonstration, as we could prove the existence of these pages. We can only remove all reasonable doubt by presenting both negative and positive arguments, and, when this is done, claim a verdict in his favor.

How Did the Universe Begin?

First of all, the universe proclaims God. The sweet singer of Israel put this most beautifully and clearly in Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." The new science is ready to confess that the universe had a beginning. Astronomy and geology both proclaim it. All doubt of this has been gradually removed as men have studied more and more deeply into the structure of the earth and the nature of the universe about us. If this universe had a beginning, then there was a sufficient First Cause, since no effect is discoverable in any part of the universe, under man's observation, that is not preceded by a cause great enough to produce it. The Christian world delights to believe that this sufficient First Cause was God.

Imagine for a moment a man, ignorant of all earthly processes, alighting some morning in Chicago at State and Randolph streets. Among other curious things, he sees a supply of morning papers. Picking up one he examines it with great curiosity, its fiery headlines, its apt and biting cartoons, its arousing and often lurid pictures. Of the urchin salesman he asks, "How did this paper happen to be?" "Search me," says the youth, "I got 'em f'm Dutchy." "Dutchy" proves to be a wagon boy who "got 'em f'm the shanty." "The shanty" is a modern printing office. Our eager friend seeks the foreman of the office. "Will you please tell me how this paper happened to be?" With the condescending smile of a master, the foreman leads the stranger to a modern Hoe press and says significantly: "This had something to do with the 'happening' of that interesting document." Innocently the eager question is put again. Had the press the power of speech it would answer: "I am but the agent in the working out of a powerful will. To find the source of that paper, you must go back of me." Going back of that monument of genius to the managing editor, the visitor once more puts his question. "Happen, man? Happen? That newspaper is the result of the directed labor of scores and hundreds of the keenest, hardest-working men of the age. Not only in this office and in this city, but all over the world, a corps of news-gatherers, typesetters and pressmen were employed to produce it. Back of every agent, every machine, every workman, is the brainiest man in Chicago. That newspaper had a sufficiently great cause," and he

points significantly to the office of the proprietor and editor-in-chief. The illustration is commonplace, but if we would trace any piece of matter to its source, the process would be similar, and we would find ourselves going backward and upward until at last the search terminated in the infinite and all-powerful God.

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill;
And back of the mill is the wheat and the shower,
And the sun, and the Father's will."

Infinite Order Proclaims Infinite Intelligence.

Not only did this universe have a sufficient First Cause that the Christian calls God, but in it is to be seen such order and symmetry as instantly declare that this First Cause had infinite intelligence, an intelligence such as only Jehovah himself can have. From the planet Neptune, majestically swinging around his orbit without the variation of a fraction of a second in a thousand years, down through all the realms of matter inanimate and animate, to the insect so small that it can be seen only through the perfect lenses of the most powerful microscope, an order and adjustment to environment is observable which declares to every reasoning mind that back of it all there stands an intelligence great enough to be called God. It would be harder to believe that all this "just happened," than to believe that God created and orders it.

We watch with interest the modern dispatcher enter-

ing his flying trains upon a great train sheet. Some are going toward the north. They will be entered at the bottom on the right-hand side of the sheet. Many are coming down toward the south. They will be entered at the top and on the left-hand side. Some are running twelve miles an hour, some twenty, some forty; one or two express trains are traveling at the rate of fifty miles an hour. As they pass each station their progress is recorded. The dispatcher sees them approaching each other. We watch his keen intelligence as, with the quickness of a perfect machine, he figures out where these trains will meet in such a way that the interests of both the slow and the fast trains may be best served. This train sheet of the dispatcher is a miniature picture of the train sheet of the universe on which the record of flying suns and worlds is kept with absolute precision. If a keen intelligence is necessary for the work of the dispatcher, can we believe that less than infinite intelligence is necessary for the work of that Mind who guides in perfect order and harmony of movement the millions of suns and stars that go to make up the universe?

From the Seen to the Unseen.

In his letter to the church at Rome, the great apostle, trying to bring the existence of God plainly to the minds of his new converts, (Romans 1: 20) used this reasonable argument: "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity."

A French atheist, on a visit to an old German baron, being shown about his estate, remarked upon the beauty of the architecture of the buildings and the perfection of the arrangement of field and wood. "Who is the author of all this beauty?" he asked. "My son," replied the parent simply. When the visitor had seen the fine hospital in perfect arrangement and appointment, where the ills of a multitude were treated year after year, the same question mounted to the lips of the Frenchman: "Who is the author of all this perfection?" And again the Christian baron replied, "My son." They came at last to a school where young men by the score were being educated and trained to the highest manhood, where many of the best minds of the age were gathered as a corps of instructors. When the Frenchman learned that this, too, was under the direction of the baron's son, he exclaimed with enthusiasm: "Your son must be a rare man indeed. I hope I may meet him before my departure." Then with a purpose in his gaze and in his heart, the Christian baron asked the significant question: "How do you know I have a son?" "Why," replied the atheist, "I can see his work. I have seen the wideness of his activity and his intelligence, and you tell me that he is the author of these beautiful and useful things that adorn your estate." "If," said the baron, "you can believe that I have a son from seeing his work, why can you not believe that there is a God, when on every side you see his work and the evidence of his intelligence?"

Shall We Accept Reliable Testimony?

The second argument is that Jesus Christ revealed God unto us, (John 1: 18) "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

In company with a large body of tourists I visited Constantinople. On every side were evidences of a hand in supreme control of the great city and of the empire of which it is the capital. We saw mosques and palaces, but did not see the sultan. On a certain afternoon, in company with a guide in whom we had perfect confidence, we drove through an elevated part of the city, and there, inside an inclosure doubly guarded by armed soldiers, our guide told us—the sultan lived and worshiped. We did not then doubt, nor have we since doubted the existence or presence of the sultan at the hour we were looking upon his home, but our knowledge of the fact depended upon the testimony of another.

In John 14:6-9 it is recorded that Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The Testimony of Sonship.

Bring any man's son before us and allow us to look at him for three minutes, and we will know very much about his father. We will know his race—whether he be African, Mongolian or Caucasian. We will be able

to determine with considerable accuracy the degree of civilization his father enjoyed. Let him speak and we will know something of his father's education and the measure of his culture. Let him move out into society for a week's intimate intercourse and we will know much of his father's nature. Surely it was no exaggeration for Christ to say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," for all confess that in walk and conversation he bore the image of the heavenly.

Nicodemus, coming to Jesus for the memorable interview, confessed frankly: "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him." The woman of Samaria knew that he was a being of superior power and intelligence, and instantly linked him with the prophets of God. The officers sent by the chief priests to take him, return empty handed saying: "Never man so spake." It was this Man who said,—and he was the only man the earth ever saw who dared to say it: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." God is like me. "I and the Father are one."

Here then is the testimony: Christ says there is a God, and he tells of his nature. He says God has all power and intelligence, and that none is able to stay his hand. He says God's character is love and his nature is kindness and he does not will that any should perish, but that all shall come to newness of life. And, further, he says that God has provided a way of approach to him.

Do you consider Christ's word reliable testimony?

Does he not proclaim a God just like the one we would be glad to have if there were none? Does it not seem reasonable then, that knowing God as he does, this Man Christ has told the truth, not only in declaring that there is a God, but in telling us of his nature also? Any jury on earth would accept the testimony of a son concerning his father, if they knew the young man to be thoroughly honest and well informed. Can we do less with the testimony of Jesus Christ concerning God?

Certain Documentary Evidence.

In the third place the Bible, our final authority and only reliable source of information upon religious matters, declares not only the existence but—just as strongly,—the providence of God. (Genesis 1:1.) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This mighty Scripture says nothing of method. It does not exclude the whole process of evolution. In the simplest possible language it makes known to the sons of men that, preceding all things that are seen, and bringing them into being, stands the infinite and eternal God.

What document is it that makes such a bold and unequivocal statement regarding this great question that confronts men? This document is the source of the civilized world's law. Before Napoleon and Cæsar and Solon, stood Moses, and every just law since Sinai has its roots in Moses' law. More, it is the source of the civilized world's morality. The Old Testament forbids adultery, the New Testament goes

a step higher and forbids lust and evil thinking. The world confesses that the moral standards of the Bible are right and as fast as man can conquer himself, he is ascending to its heights. The Bible gives us our only knowledge of God's dealings with men for several thousand years, it gives us our greatest impulses toward righteousness, it gives us our only hope of heaven.

Now when a book of this nature speaks on any subject do you not think it can be trusted to speak the truth? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Of providence God speaks through Isaiah (ch. 43: 1-3), "But now thus saith Jehovah that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; . . . when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned. . . . For I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." The forms of deliverance enumerated in the passage may be figurative, but they have led devout men in every age to believe not only that God is, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and to say out of a full, a rich experience: "Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Shall We Believe Until We Know?

Once when our Saviour had concluded an afternoon of gracious labor and self-revelation, his disciples asked him in the quiet of their evening conversation,

"Why is it, Lord, that thou dost reveal thyself to us and not unto the world?" Then he said that only those who love him can understand him in his fullness. He does not withhold himself, but, just as the lover understands the full message of his adored one when only a word is spoken, so when Christ speaks, those who love him understand all, while strangers insist that he speaks in parables. One of the company caught the idea clearly and later writing out his own message, made it very plain by saying (John 8: 47): "He that is of God heareth the words of God." That is to say, only after a man has accepted God and declared his belief in him, is he in a position to understand his words and know him truly.

Shall we accept by faith and know afterwards of the certainty of God's existence and providence? In his youth Thoreau felt sure Emerson was a man so great, that it would pay him to give up all his life plans for the privilege of living in his family. After half a dozen years there he knew that he had been right. Near the close of his life Gladstone said to the undergraduates of Edinburgh University: "In some things it is best to believe before experience, to believe until experience convinces you of the truth of that which others have told you." In our religious life also it is sometimes best to believe until we can know. When once we have accepted God as our Father and Christ as our Saviour, the Holy Spirit takes of the things of God and reveals them unto us. Thus, while we may convince ourselves of the existence of God from evidences and by arguments, the fullness of the truth can

be ours only when spiritual things become clear to us because we are spiritual.

Joy and Strength from Yielding.

If God exists, he has a purpose in this universe, and if in this universe, then in you. With most men it is not a question of more knowledge of God or of more faith, but simply of yielding the will to him and saying, "I will do what you want me to do." Have you not tried your own way long enough, and have you not learned that the way of the disobedient and unbelieving is hard?

A young student in a western high school once refused to do the work assigned him by his teacher. When the teacher insisted, the student stubbornly declared that he would not obey. "Then," said the teacher, "we must stay here until you do." With stolid face the disobedient student sat for an hour without the first sign of yielding. At last the teacher said kindly: "John, you know there is no reason in your refusal to do this work, that it is your duty to do it, and that you will be benefited by doing it. Why, then, do you thus hold out against what is so clearly right?" Suddenly the student recognized his error and yielded his will. With tears in his eyes he confessed that he had been in the wrong, and set about his task with eagerness. Then he knew a joy he had not known for weeks. Thus will it be with men, who, having withstood the appeals of the heavenly Father for long years, having grown hardened in heart, perhaps in sin, come to realize the fact of God's love for

them and the sin of their own disobedience. When they finally yield to him, a joy and satisfaction will flood their souls of which they have not dreamed.

May it please the Father that some who began this chapter doubting, may finish it believing and rejoicing.

HOW CAN I KNOW THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

III

HOW CAN I KNOW THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Is the Bible True?

The Bible will ever be an object of profound interest to every thinking mind, because it is an interest-compelling book, so different from all others, treating subjects so sublime and vital, while it points the way to the City of God. No normal man, once in contact with it, can pass it by without the deepest consideration.

If what this Bible says is true, then man may know positively about things concerning which the human race has ever questioned: the mystery of creation and life, of death and the immortality of the soul, of God and the marvelous Jesus of Nazareth.

But is the Bible true? Is it the word of God? Are its statements God's revelation to man of things which otherwise he could not know? If these questions can be answered in the affirmative the religious life of many honest inquirers can be forever settled.

A Unique Book.

That the Bible is a unique book, unlike all others and infinitely greater than all others, has been admitted in all ages by their master minds.

Long years ago, John Milton, the companion and friend of Cromwell, and—save one—the greatest poet England ever produced, said, "There are no songs to be compared to the songs of Zion, no oratory equal to that of the Prophets, no politics like those the Scripture teaches."

The Emperor Napoleon, who had time and thought for only the greatest men, the greatest books, the greatest events said: "The gospel is no mere book, but a living creature, with a vigor, a power, which conquers all that opposes it. Here lies the book of books upon the table. I do not tire of reading it, and do so daily with equal pleasure. The soul, charmed with the beauty of the gospel, is no longer its own; God possesses it entirely; he directs its thoughts and faculties: it is his. What a proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ!"

John Ruskin, England's greatest essayist, who has charmed the world by his "Modern Painters" and "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," spoke much of the Scriptures. Among other striking words he uttered these: "I attribute all my vigor of thought and expression to the fact that my mother taught me the Bible and especially that she made me learn the first eight chapters of Proverbs."

As Queen Victoria once handed a copy of the Bible to an Indian prince she said to her interpreter, "Tell the prince that this book is really the secret of all England's power and prosperity."

Her Majesty's greatest subject, William E. Gladstone, author of "The Impregnable Rock of Holy

Scripture," one of the greatest defenses of the Bible ever written, said: "I have served my country faithfully because I have served my God so faithfully. There is nothing that makes a man brave and patriotic and faithful like a constant study of this old book."

Theodore Roosevelt in an address delivered at Oyster Bay, Long Island, on June 11, 1901, said: "The immense moral influence of the Bible, though, of course, the most important, is not the only power it has for good. In addition, there is the increasing influence it exerts on the side of good taste, of good literature, of proper sense of proportion, of simple and straightforward writing and thinking."

Our great General Grant said, "To the influence of this Bible we are indebted for all the progress we have ever made, and we must look to it as our guide in the future."

The beloved Abraham Lincoln, writing to Joshua Speed about a year before his lamented taking off said: "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all this book on reason that you can and the balance on faith and you will live and die a better man."

What is to be said about this book that has led the greatest men in the greatest nations of the earth, in the most advanced stage of civilization, to say that it is a character-making, an empire-building book, the greatest power known among men? What is to be said about it? That it is a lie? a cheat? a bundle of legends? a purely human book palming itself off as divine? Is falsehood more powerful than truth? Could

deceit be kept up through two thousand years of closest scrutiny? Is the Bible the word of God, or is it the word of unworthy and deceitful men?

An Explanation and a Definition.

Before entering upon a detailed consideration of these matters, it would be well to answer two questions: "What do you mean when you speak of the Bible as the word of God? Do you mean, that God wrote it in heaven, and miraculously delivered the manuscript, from which our copies are printed, to some ancient prophet? Or do you mean that God dictated it, word for word, to certain men, and that in our common versions we have the very words God spoke?"

Most certainly I mean neither of these. The last theory, lovingly held by our fathers, has long since been abandoned. What I do mean is this: God desired to reveal his will to his earthly children: he chose certain excellent and worthy men and, by inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit, rendered them infallible in making that will known to men. In most cases he left them free to choose the channel through which they should communicate that will. Some chose history; some parable; some legend; some quotation from earlier writings; some were led to use stately prophecy and some the heart-warming song.

The thought, the spirit, the soul, the essential element of the Scriptures is God's, and therefore true and infallible; the earthly shell in which this life-giving meat is given to the world is man's. It may, in places,

partake of man's weaknesses, it may reveal his mistakes, it may not be perfect from a material standpoint; but the spirit, the kernel, the heart of every book in the majestic volume reveals infallibly the will of God. It is man's business to dig below the surface, find the pure gold and apply it to his life.

By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them.

In considering the external evidences for the genuineness of the Scriptures let us apply the old law, emphasized by the Saviour, that the quality of an organism may be known by the fruit it bears. He said: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" and again, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

According to this principle, which everyone instantly confesses is universal and fair, if the Bible is false; if it is a lie, a cheat; if it is a bundle of legends and "old wives' fables"; if, claiming to be a revelation from God, it is but the effusion of impure and fanatical brains, we know exactly what to look for as a result of its being spread broadcast over the earth: we must look for disorder and fanaticism, low morals, lying, cheating and a declining civilization.

What are the facts? We find that exactly the contrary is true. Wherever the Bible goes, there springs up at once a new type of man, a new standard of living. Some follower of Livingstone carries the Bible to the semi-barbarous tribes of Africa, and within a decade they put away their war clubs and idolatrous

worship, don the dress of civilization, and begin to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. Let some John G. Paton visit the heathen tribes of the islands of the sea. Soon they turn from cannibalism and generate a spirit of brotherhood beautiful to behold. Let some Sky Pilot visit the lumber-jacks of the great Northwest and proclaim the messages of this Bible, and lo! the gaming tables are forsaken by half their patrons, the saloons complain that the missionary is ruining their business, while men save money for wife and little ones, who hardly gave them a thought before.

If the Bible does this for men in every nation and condition can it be a lie and a cheat? Must it not be what it claims to be? "By their fruits ye shall know them."

A Wider External Evidence.

The principle we are applying to our problem admits of a still wider application. Ancient writings, cherished as is our Bible, are to be found in practically every great nation of the world. What fruits have they borne? Do these fruits suggest that the writings were inspired by our all-wise, all-loving heavenly Father? The fruit of the Veda is modern India; the writings of Confucius produced modern China, while the Koran has given to the world modern Turkey. When these nations with their low state of morals, their heartless castes, their enslavement of women, their superstition and idolatry, are compared with England and America where the Bible is the treasure of the majority of our households, where superstition and idolatry are well-

nigh unknown, where women and children are held in loving equality with men, where the spirit of brotherhood and kindly interest pervades every heart, where men "do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God." what shall we say of the book responsible for it all? Surely we must say that it is true; that it is what it purports to be, a revelation of the will of God for the guidance of man.

A Look Within.

Over against these external evidences, which are enough to convince most minds of the truth of the Bible's claims, stands the mighty volume itself, which must be, of course, the court of highest appeal. Does the Bible itself prove that it had more than a human source? Does it bear the stamp of the divine?

What Is the Nature of the Matter the Bible Contains?

It tells about God, his work, his character, the motive which prompted him to action, his dealings with men throughout several thousand years and the final fulfillment of all his promises to Israel in the life and service of Jesus of Nazareth. These are things no human being, unaided, could know in their fullness.

In their quibbling over questions of astronomy, geology, zoölogy and anthropology, men have well-nigh lost the real message of Genesis. The writer of Genesis clearly had no thought of attempting to reveal the method by which the Creator worked; nor was he occupied with questions of time or order, these were matters of too small moment. The tremendous mes-

sage of Genesis, the book of Beginnings is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is inclusive, but it is by no means exclusive. What more of the infinite universe around us may have been created by the same fiat, what forces employed, what time consumed, Genesis does not pretend to say; for that the "day spoken of here does not mean our day of twenty-four hours, our diurnal day, is evident from the fact, that the sun was not set to perform its special service to this earth until the fourth 'day.' The 'day' of early Genesis was clearly a period of time whose length we have no means of knowing."

So concerning the creation of man. Man did not spring out of the rocks; he did not grow on a tree; he did not make himself. God created him. That is the important thing. What care we for the process? If man is God-created, then God is his Father and to God he is responsible. Upon this follows the call to righteousness and the whole scheme of redemption.

The pagan world says that God is unbridled force, angry and revengeful, or he is simply man projected to superior proportions like Zeus or Jupiter—a superhuman being, but still limited and imperfect, who has to do with this little world alone. The Bible reveals to us that "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth," and that the motive which prompts him to action is love, not anger or jealousy or vengeance.

The Bible alone makes it possible for us to understand Jesus of Nazareth who so powerfully affected

the world. To human knowledge he is incomprehensible. When the Bible reveals to us that while he was the Son of Mary according to the flesh, he was the Son of God according to the Spirit, everything becomes plain. He could not have done less than he did, and anything more would have been superfluous.

Harder to understand than all else, without superhuman aid, is the mighty, benevolent, enlightening force that works so silently in God-awakened hearts. The Bible reveals the fact that this is the third person of the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the Father and with the Son, and that since Jesus has gone back to his Father's side, this loving force, the Holy Spirit, works in the world in his stead, comforting broken hearts and drawing all men to the Father. No unaided human mind has ever given the race so much as a hint of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to all this, the Bible tells man of the things that his Creator approves in his life, and the things that he disapproves. It tells what God declares to be man's duty and it points out his privileges. It does so with such boldness and calmness and confidence that honest men are driven to say: "This knowledge never came from man alone. The Bible is a God-inspired book."

Method of Production Speaks of Source.

Perhaps the partially convinced man is now moved to say: "But if the Bible is the word of God, how did man get it? How was the Bible written?"

A very small, but a very important, part of it, the

Ten Commandments, was written, according to the story of Moses, by God himself upon tables of stone, amidst thunderings and lightnings on Mt. Sinai. A part of it was written by good men in response to immediate divine direction, as in the case of Moses. "Jehovah spake unto Moses, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying," and when the aged Apostle John wrote: "I heard behind me a great voice saying, . . . Write." But the greater part of the Bible was written by men in response to an irresistible impulse which literally drove them to their task, but left them free to use their own words or symbols or parables, in making known to men the truth that had been revealed to them. As the Reformed faiths of the world declare: "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

A few examples will illustrate the principle. The truth that, having evolved a plan, God uses every human event toward the fulfillment of that plan, even while he in no wise interferes with the free will of men, is revealed in the history of Abraham, Joseph and the children of Israel.

The truth that human love is not dependent upon, or even aided, by the trappings of wealth, or position, or outward splendor, is revealed to us in the impassioned measures of Solomon's Song.

The truth that it is useless to flee from a God-imposed duty was intrusted for declaration to the author of the Book of Jonah, and he chose as the best vehicle, the story of the prophet's embassy to Nineveh and its unusual attendant circumstances.

Personally, I have never been in the least disturbed by the so-called errors or inaccuracies of Scripture. A work does not have to be mechanically perfect in order to be spiritually perfect. So long as the slight inaccuracies often pointed out in the mechanical make-up of the Bible do not pervert the truth the author is trying to reveal, they in no way detract from the Bible as an infallible revelation of God's will.

If God had needed a book mechanically perfect he would doubtless have made it in heaven instead of simply rendering certain chosen men infallible in the communication of his will, leaving them free in the main, to choose the language or the incident in which to reveal that truth to the world.

It is at this point that many earnest students have stumbled. Because of erroneous training or wrong preconceptions they have demanded of the Bible that it be mechanically perfect and that every statement be a statement of fact, given for itself alone. Discovering that the book is not mechanically perfect and failing to understand that many apparent statements of fact are either quotations concerning other events which seemed to the author to fit the situation he was trying to describe, or ancient stories or legends or allegories incorporated in the sacred narrative, not for themselves, but for the truths they teach or the morals they point, many a reader has turned away from the Bible and rejected it as the word of God. An intelligent comprehension of the literary structure of the Bible would save many a man his faith.

Its Sublime Content.

A third evidence that the Bible is the book of God is found in the sublime quality of the matter it contains. The books of the Old Testament were written when customs and social practices were not yet up to the standards set by Christ. They contain the record of as many things men of our day are to avoid, as of things they are to practice, so that if, with critical intent, men search the Bible, they will find things recorded as permitted of God which even our imperfect age would condemn. The polygamy and concubinage of the age of the patriarchs and the loose social customs which ever attend such practices, and the slavery of the days of early Israel, to which the Bible seems to give sanction, are examples of this. Christ explains to the men of his age that God never approved of those unhappy practices; they were a grief to him and were permitted only until increasing intelligence in men would cast them out. Many of those practices are recorded to show their error and save us from falling into them ourselves.

But if, on the other hand, with pure heart, the student seeks for the best in this mighty library, he will find it superior to all else the ablest writers of the world have produced. It was the custom of a company of leading Scotchmen of the last decade, among whom were Henry Drummond, Ian Maclaren, George Adam Smith and others equally capable and devout, to spend a week or two out of every summer in camp among the heather-strewn hills of their native country. During one of these memorable outings the

conversation turned on the literary quality of certain parts of the Bible. With no thought of irreverence it was suggested that when the company separated for the night each one should do his utmost to compose a page of matter equal in thought and style to the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the Lord's Prayer. On reassembling at breakfast not a man would read a line he had written, each one confessing that the task was infinitely beyond his powers. And yet these men were the literary lights of their generation, the authors of "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush," the "Historical Geography of the Holy Land" and the leading commentaries on Isaiah and the Minor Prophets.

The famous Dr. Johnson once silenced the statement of an infidel that the Proverbs of Solomon were not unusual, by the challenge: "You make a few."

Read the narrative of creation; the eighth and nineteenth Psalms; the Sermon on the Mount; the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians; John's vision of the City of God in the closing chapters of Revelation. What mighty grasp of the things of time and eternity! What exalted faith! What purity of character! what heroism in self-reunciation! What sublime consecration to the will and the work of God! Search literature through, and you will not find elsewhere the equal of these.

Many Parts: A Single Message.

This divine library contains but a single message. It is an entity, a unit. And herein lies one of the

strongest proofs that it is a revelation of the will of God. The Bible contains sixty-six separate and distinct books. They were written during a period of from fifteen hundred to three thousand years by upwards of thirty writers who had little or no knowledge of each other, many of whom were separated by centuries of time and miles of territory. Yet there are no breaks. Every part supports every other part, while the whole reveals God's love and his faultless plan for the redemption of a lost race.

For example, the prophecies concerning Christ accord perfectly with the events attending his coming and his life. The Messiah was to be of the seed of David; he was to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem of Judæa; he was to be sinless, yet he was to suffer as a sacrifice for the sins of others; he was to enter Jerusalem astride the foal of an ass, amidst the hosannas of the multitude; he was to die among malefactors; after three days, he was to rise again, triumphing over all his enemies. These prophecies were given by different men, in widely different ages, yet every one was literally fulfilled by Christ. Such unity is absolutely unexplainable on any other hypothesis than that a single Mind of infinite power, was controlling its production for a specific purpose, throughout all these years.

Contains What Man Needs.

The Bible contains exactly what we would ask for in the book of God if there were none. We can ourselves find out much about the world and our life here. We want to know about the infinite Power that evi-

dently has this universe in control. We want to know about life in its higher sense; whence does it come and whither is it going? We want to know about the mystery of death, and whether there is a life for the soul when the body, its present dwelling place, decays.

And this is exactly what the Bible tells. It leaves ordinary subjects to ordinary men. It is not a book of science, or a book of astronomy, or a book of philosophy. It is a book of life, a book of light, a book of love, a book of God.

Man Not Left to His Own Devices.

It is inconceivable that such a God as the universe reveals, a God of intelligence, a God of order, a God who provides for all the needs and longings he has created, would leave his intelligent children without some kind of revelation. No earthly father, knowing the dangers of a wilderness, would start his young children through it without telling them how to go. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more . . . your Father who is in heaven?"

No man would contend for a moment that any other book known to the race is the word of God. I have already spoken of the frailty of the revered writings of other civilizations—India, China, Turkey. Think of the great authors of Christendom. There are not many, aside from the Bible: Dante, Milton, Shakspere, Goethe. Did any of them produce the Bible, the revelation of God's will? The very question is repugnant and well-nigh blasphemous. Thus by a

process of elimination we are forced back to the Bible as God's word, the book that has stood the test of ages, that has done so much for men and nations and we are forced to accept it as the one guidebook God has given to wandering children.

The Bible's Presence Among Men a Proof That It Is God's Book.

To me one of the strongest proofs that the Bible is the word of God is that we have the book at all. Not one other writing, except a few names and dates on the monuments of Egypt, has come down to us from the time of Moses and Joshua, of David and Solomon and Hezekiah. We have only fragments from the works of the greatest men of the age of Grecian glory while very little written matter of any kind has come to us from the day of the Roman emperors. Why should this book have been saved through so much longer a period? Divine intervention is the only answer.

Just as surely as throughout all the ages and all the frailties and lapses of the race, God has preserved a remnant who remained faithful to him, so, I profoundly believe, through every change of nation and attitude toward him from the earliest ages, God has preserved the record of his dealings with his people, as a guide to generations that come after.

Most Important of All.

The Bible is the one book that tells lost men how they may get back to God. If there were nothing else, this ought to prove its origin. Other great books

deal only with man's life on earth; with the life of his body. The Bible alone deals with the life of his soul, and tells him how that soul may be enriched and saved. How would unaided men know these facts, and what would prompt them to write them down and preserve them? Man physical has ever been baffled by man spiritual. He can understand this higher life only in the light of the revelation of God contained in the Bible.

A Swift Review.

It will be helpful to review in a few words the arguments in support of the claims made by and for the Bible as the word of God. The good fruit it bears when applied to the life of men and nations; the subjects it treats, touched by no other book and of supreme importance to man; the manner in which the marvelous book was written; the sublime quality of the matter it contains, superior to all purely human productions; the unity which pervades its sixty-six books; the fact that it contains what we would ask for in the word of God if there were none; the fact that it is inconceivable that God would leave intelligent creatures like men without some kind of guide and surely no other book can be called his; the fact that through all changes in which other ancient writings have been lost this one has been preserved in so perfect a condition, and, finally, the fact that it is the only book that treats of the soul and tells lost men how they may get back to God; these are the leading arguments for the divine authorship of the Bible.

Continue to search the Scriptures, for you are right

in thinking that in them ye shall find eternal life. Says the eloquent Dr. Hillis:

"Never before has the Bible been so truly a God-inspired book. Never before have scientists and scholars felt the full fascination of its glorious pages. Young men need this book once bedewed by the sweet mother's tears. Young women and maidens need this book that lent the revered father his manhood and strength. Poverty needs this book, childhood needs this book, liberty and learning need this sacred volume. When its truths fall, eloquence will lose its dignity, the library will lose its glory, civilization will lose its power. Not until the last wrong has been righted, the last wound healed, the last tear wiped away, will this book have accomplished its mission. For it is the book of hope, the book of comfort, the book of conduct and character, the book of time, the book of eternity, and, therefore, it is the book of God."

Here then the mighty volume stands as virile and timely for the twentieth century as for the first. It has strength for the young, wisdom for the mature, philosophy for the profound, comfort and hope for man's declining years. It is as good for the peasant as for the king, for India or Africa as for America. A universal book, good for all time, all nations, all conditions. Study the Bible then with the heart and with the understanding. Get all the light you can on its literary structure for this will remove many difficulties and reveal much of the hidden richness of the sacred volume. Then do what Dr. Chapman has been urging the people of America to do for the past decade: study it through; pray it in; work it out; pass it on.

IF A MAN DOES THE BEST HE CAN, WILL HE NOT GO TO HEAVEN?

IV

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The Two Kingdoms.

This question, which, in some form, has been asked by men of every race in every generation, clearly reveals that, in the soul of man, there is a longing for the rest and peace suggested by thoughts of heaven and that the right to enter is a desirable possession and worth striving for.

The way to heaven has been clearly marked out. Why do not all take it without question? It is not because men do not know God's plan, but that they prefer to gain the same end by other and less self-denying means. Surely in some cases, the asking of this question simply means, "Can I not do just what I please and still go to heaven?" In others: "Do I have to become a Christian in order to be saved? If I do as nearly right as I know how; if I vote right, pay my debts, commit no open and flagrant sins; if I do nothing worse than take a flyer now and then in self-indulgence just to break the monotony, will I not go to heaven?"

Now, the men who honestly ask this question appear totally to misunderstand both heaven and the means of reaching it. They put it on the same basis as questions of everyday business; as for instance, "If I rise

promptly at six o'clock in the morning, go to work at seven, and work hard all day, may I not attain physical comfort and the means for supplying my wants, instead of dealing in stocks and bonds and other high finance which I do not at all understand?" This question has to do with things that are wholly upon earth, wholly among men, that are to be accomplished wholly by certain physical and mental activity. Getting into the millionaire class may be accomplished by shrewdness and perseverance, it will be purely a human accomplishment. But when one talks about getting into heaven, an entirely new element is involved. Heaven is not controlled by Wall Street. No amount of human shrewdness can turn a five-pound bowlder into a bunch of tea roses. "Of course not," says some quick thinker. "They do not belong to the same kingdom." You have hit the nail squarely. Neither do men and angels belong to the same kingdom.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, eager to know more of the new way of life, Christ, anticipating his question, said plainly: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It is perhaps not to be wondered at that Nicodemus was surprised at this answer. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Seeing the learned man's predicament the Saviour replied in substance: "Nicodemus, there are two kingdoms in which every man may move if he wills. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit. If you, living in the flesh, wish to enter the kingdom where spirits dwell, you must be born again." (John 3: 1-16.)

The Word of an Expert.

Jesus was a specialist in religion. When we wish any work done particularly well, we send for some man who has specialized in the department in which we need help. Several years ago a surgeon was brought from distant Austria by a well-known family in Chicago that he might perform an operation so delicate that it baffled all the skill of American physicians. When the late Dr. Harper, President of Chicago University, was to be operated upon, the most skilled surgeon in New York City was brought by special arrangement that his particular skill might be brought to bear upon the renowned educator's difficulty. If we want help in the great work of getting back to God, let us consult a specialist.

Getting into heaven is particular business. We dare not trust the instruction of a novice. If this Jesus, the greatest authority in religious matters the world has ever seen, has spoken on the subject of men's getting back to God, his words are worthy of our most serious consideration. One tremendous truth stands out like a mighty headland: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 15:50.) If men would go to heaven, they must be born into the spiritual kingdom.

It is at this point that most men falter. How can a human being be born into a spiritual kingdom? Not at all by the exercise of his physical being; it is a work of the mind and of the heart. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." (1 John 5:1.) No words could be plainer. One cannot see

how they can be misunderstood. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." This constitutes our new birth; it is possible, not because of any human activity or ingenuity, but because God has reached down by his grace and given to believing men the spark of life.

A Famous Illustration.

Let us view again the familiar illustration used by Henry Drummond, that each kingdom is hermetically sealed from above, and that no member of a lower kingdom can rise into the next higher until the higher kingdom breaks through the crust and lifts the lower up. There is only one possible way of turning a five-pound bowlder into a bunch of tea roses: the bowlder must be crushed and exposed to the elements until it has returned to dust; then in the soil thus made some member of a higher order must plant within this new soil a tiny rosebush. Immediately the substance of the bowlder will be lifted up into the next higher kingdom and, soon, it will be presented to the world in all the beauty of coloring and fragrance of the full-blown rose. The vegetable kingdom may reach the animal only when the animal reaches down through the crust which the vegetable cannot possibly break and, absorbing it into itself, lifts it into the higher kingdom; and the animal, man, though endowed with mental power and intelligence beyond all creatures earth has ever seen is unable to raise himself to the next higher kingdom until the Lord of that kingdom again breaks through the impenetrable crust and

touches human life with that which is divine. Man believes; God gives him spiritual life. Man accepts Jesus as the Christ; God has declared that this belief shall constitute his birth into the higher kingdom.

Do you understand it now? Here is no mystery. Mastery of all known facts about electricity and acceptance of its laws, constitute a man's birth into the electrical kingdom. He has life there now, while a year ago he was dead to it. You are now dead to the kingdom of God. You wish to live in it. How may you? "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." To be "begotten of God" is to be born into the kingdom of God. To believe in Jesus Christ is to be "born from above." Now at least we understand it. Is this the only way?

One Way Enough.

As to the necessity of believing in Christ, if we would be saved, the Bible, our only reliable source of information on this subject, leaves absolutely no doubt. Plainer words could not be uttered than those spoken by Christ himself: "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me." The disciple that lived nearest him during his pilgrimage, and who in consequence is able to give us the most accurate picture of his life and detailed report of his utterance, tells us, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life." (John 3:36.) And the man who stood next nearest, as he defended himself against the wrath of the high priest for having miraculously cured the poor beggar at the gate of the

temple, which is called beautiful, said with sublime courage: "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.)

One asks with eagerness and absolute sincerity: "Why do men ask for a second way? Would another be easier than the one God has already provided?" Would you ask that it be? If we are not willing to go to heaven in the way God has provided and made clear, is it reasonable to think that we would find that heavenly home if a second or a third or even a tenth way were offered us as alternatives?

"No," but Also "Yes."

Then to the question, "If a man does the best he can, will he not go to heaven?" there are two answers, according to the interpretation of the words, "the best he can." If the words mean, "Do as he pleases, and without Christ," then, the Bible being our authority, the answer must be: "No." But if the words mean opening the eyes to all the light God has shed upon our world, to the experience of our fathers throughout the ages, to God's revelation of himself in the person of his Son, to all the impulses toward righteousness that continually urge us to a higher life, then the man who "does the best he can" is following God's plan, and the answer must be a positive and triumphant "Yes."

CAN I NOT BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT BELIEVING THAT CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD?

V

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The Mystery of Incarnation.

The very thought of the incarnation of Deity has ever been a staggering one to the unspiritual world. That God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, would manifest himself in human flesh seems to the worldly mind incredible. Like their forefathers of Jesus' day, men ask for a sign, that will forever put beyond question a fact they are really anxious to believe. But it is not in the plan of God to give a sign other than the life of Jesus itself. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29.) We do not need a sign to prove a walnut tree or an apple tree. Their fruit proclaims them. So does the life and work of Jesus proclaim his nature. "I know men," said Napoleon near the close of his amazing career, "and I tell you that Jesus is not a man. Everything in him amazes me. His spirit outreaches mine, and his will confounds me. Comparison is impossible between him and any other being in the world. He is truly a being by himself. His ideas and his sentiments; the truth that he announces; his manner of convincing; are all beyond

humanity and the natural order of things. His birth, and the story of his life; the profoundness of his doctrine, which overturns all difficulties, and is their most complete solution; his gospel, the singularity of his mysterious being; his appearance; his empire; his progress through all countries and kingdoms;—all this is to me a prodigy, an unfathomable mystery. I see nothing here of man. Near as I may approach, closely as I may examine, all remains above my comprehension—great with a greatness that crushes me. It is in vain that I reflect—all remains unaccountable!"[1]

Have we become so bold that we would tear away the veil and gaze with undaunted eye upon the very face of God? One trembles sometimes at the rapidity with which the mystery is being cleared away. Scholarly Bible study and experience in God's love and the growth of the spirit of brotherhood seem about to reveal the very heart of the Father itself. But perhaps we may safely trust him to withhold enough to keep man hoping and trusting and believing until his purpose in us has been accomplished.

Something must be left to trust, something must be left to hope, for we no longer hope for the things we have in our possession. The things we possess we soon tire of; we begin to look for larger things. If all the mystery were taken out of our Christianity, if the whole thing were reduced to a certainty, like an acre of ground or a barrel of flour, or even a Regent diamond or a marble palace, man would soon tire of

[1] Quoted by Geikie, "Life of Christ," p. 13.

it and ask if there were nothing new under the sun.

The two conceptions of Christ that prevail to-day are: First, that he was what the Scriptures proclaim him and what he claimed to be, the Son of God; second, that he was a particularly good man with keen religious instincts and high morals; that he was the world's greatest Teacher. Perhaps the most significant comment on these two conceptions is that churches holding the first grow and thrive, while those holding the second eke out a poor existence for a few years and finally die of dry rot.

In our cities one occasionally observes a glass case before a store that flaunts in his face all the vivid colors of the rainbow. Flowers are there in profusion, and fruits and grain and forms of birds. But there is no song, no fragrance, no bursting buds. Beautiful as the whole is, there is no life, and all must soon go back to dust again. But walk past the city streets out into the country lanes. The flowers here are more beautiful to look upon, while they exhale a fragrance that charms the senses; fruit trees groan under their heavy burden of life-giving food; the birds pour forth their anthems of praise to him who giveth to all things life and health and every good thing.

This is the difference between the lower and higher conceptions of Jesus. The lower is dead, no matter how beautiful: "still life," the artist would call it. The higher throbs and glows with the spirit that is in it. It grows and increases and covers the earth.

A Strange and Unnatural Question.

The question before us in this chapter is a strange one: "Can I not be a Christian without believing that Christ is the Son of God?" Why a person would care to be a Christian and not thereby purchase for himself all the benefits that flow from full Christianity, I have never been quite able to understand. Being a Christian is by no means an easy task. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24), is Christ's own portrayal of the difficulties of the Christian life. "Do not expect a rich reward in this life," he said in substance at another time, "but if you are my disciple indeed you shall receive a reward that is worth while at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14.)

What do you wish to gain by your Christianity? If simply the name of being a good man while you live on the earth—and the object is not wholly unworthy—you can practice some of the virtues of Jesus, such as purity of life, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, without believing that he is the Son of God; then your virtues will die with you. But if by your Christianity you wish to win eternal life, if you wish to give your soul birth into the realm of the Spirit, then the case is entirely different, and we must for answer consult the Scriptures, our only source of knowledge on this point, and discover the conditions of redemption as given by God himself.

What the Scriptures Say.

Putting aside for a moment the question of your belief in Christ as the Son of God, let us ask the Scriptures whether or not he is the Son of God. God called him his Son many times. "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7.) As Christ returned from his baptism, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape, as a dove, upon him and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21, 22.)

He is declared the Son of God by many inspired writers. In the "Little Gospel" (John 3:16), it is very clear. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world." (John 3:17.) "The gospel of God . . . concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:1-4.) "If God is for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31, 32.) All through his earthly ministry Christ referred to himself as the Son of God and called God his Father. "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30.) "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John 20:21.) In all his prayers the relationship is especially prominent: "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight." (Matthew 11:26.) After his long talk with his disciples, re-

corded by John, he prayed: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee." (John 17:1; read the entire chapter.)

A good man does not make false claims or try to mislead his followers. From the first to the last, the Bible declares that Christ is the Son of God. On this point there can be no question.

Must You Believe It?

If now we renew our question and ask whether it is necessary for you to believe that Christ is the Son of God in order that you may have the benefits of Christianity, including forgiveness of sin and eternal life, we have but to turn again to the Bible, where the question is answered in a score of places: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16.) But John puts it even more strongly in the same chapter: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:35, 36.) When the Jews asked, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28), Jesus answered: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (V. 29.) Finally, it is our belief in Christ as the Son of God that gives us our own birth into the kingdom of God. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." (1 John 5:1.)

But let us go a step farther. Without belief in Christ as the Son of God, and as, therefore, essentially God himself, there is no forgiveness of sins, for the Jews were right when they asked, implying a negative answer, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:20-26.) God forgives our sins not because of any worthiness of our own, but because of the worthiness of Jesus Christ his Son, whose worthiness is put over on us when we believe in him. His sacrifice pays the debt of our sin and justifies God in forgiving us.

How brazen we have become that we can meditate upon the sacrifice of Jesus with dry eyes! For us that agony in Gethsemane; for us those tears; for us that sweat as it were great drops of blood! For us the cruel cross, the crown of thorns, the chamber of death! The sinless Son of God was paying the debt of every sinful man who, anywhere on earth, at any time, believes in him!

But there is one more step. Without belief in Jesus as the Son of God, there would be no Christianity, no Christian church. Not until his disciples were ready to confess, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," could Jesus say, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:13-18.) There is but one conclusion: No man can be a Christian in the full sense of that mighty word without accepting Jesus as the Son of God.

There is no other foundation. It is this or nothing, as the ages have proved. When belief in Christ as the

Son of God weakens, the church falls; as it revives and confession is renewed, the church revives and advances. It has been so in every age. We must not only believe it, we must lay emphasis upon it, and the same witnessing to the divine sonship of Christ of apostolic days will again revive the church, and thousands upon thousands will be added to it of such as shall be saved. An expurgated Christianity is a powerless Christianity. Believe it as the Bible gives it. This alone gives life and power.

The race demands a divine Saviour. Nothing less than God can satisfy the human heart or give sufficient assurance of forgiveness of sins. Christianity without Christ as divine is a powerless Christianity. To the beauty of Christ's character must be added his relationship with God and his willingly shed blood. When he is lifted up as divine, he draws all men unto himself. We must have an efficacious Saviour, and, to be such, he must be the Son of God.

WHAT ARE THE PROOFS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS?

VI

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The Most Important Question of All.

Those thinkers are surely right who insist that to prove to a man that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead after three days in the tomb, is to take the longest step toward winning him to Christianity. Many doubting men have said to me, "If you can convince me that Jesus came back to life after being unquestionably dead, I say frankly that I would become a Christian, for if I could believe this, all other disturbing questions concerning him may be dismissed. This is greater than his virgin birth; this swallows up the question of the miracles credited to him; this makes all else at once acceptable."

While few men would make this proof an essential for the acceptance of Christianity, in view of the many other proofs of its genuineness and value, it constitutes a challenge which the church should gladly take up, for the proofs are abundant and convincing. "The resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Lyman Abbott, "is the best-attested fact of history." It is widely confessed that upon one-tenth the proofs which attest the resurrection, we unquestionably accept the story of the life and work of Socrates, of

Alexander, of Julius Cæsar, and many another of those early ages. Man's only ground for rejecting this historical fact is that it has a miraculous element, that it is a thing unusual, a thing that transcends our ordinary experience and understanding. What are the proofs for the resurrection of Jesus? Are they sufficient to convince honest inquirers that it occurred, and to lead them closer to him? With mind and heart open and willing to be convinced, let us follow them through.

The Possibility of Resurrection at Once Admitted.

That the resurrection of Jesus, or of anybody else, for that matter, is a possibility, is instantly admitted in our day. Twentieth-century men are not disposed to limit the measure of God's workings. No well-informed man doubts that God created the first man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, however widely he may differ from orthodoxy as to the process. Well, if God gave the breath of life to Adam, who never before had it, will any man say that God could not return the breath of life to the body of Jesus from which it had been absent but a few hours?

Even the possibility of the resurrection of bodies that have decayed and passed into the air as gases, seems an easily credible thing in view of a simple incident, said to have occurred in the laboratory of the scientist Faraday. A much-prized silver goblet was dropped by a careless workman into a vat of acid. Immediately the fierce element attacked the silver,

eating it atom by atom, until it disappeared from view, held in solution by the clear liquid. The workman was in despair, but the great chemist, reassuring him, set about recovering the treasure. To the uninitiated, the goblet was lost, but the scientist knew that, although it was no longer visible, its form was only changed—the silver was all there, and could be brought together again. The scientist poured the right chemical into the solution, and the silver was quickly precipitated. Then it was gathered together and sent to a silversmith with the proper designs. In a few days the goblet was in its place again, none the worse for its strange experience.

If the scientist, under all the limitations of the flesh, could gather together the atoms of that scattered silver, will anyone deny that the great Chemist has the ability to gather the scattered elements that once made up a man, set them in order again and start him upon a better and higher life?

To the Proofs in Detail.

Naturally the proof of the resurrection of Jesus that first occurs to the student, and the one to which he is compelled to give great weight, is that four reliable historians, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, say that it occurred. Their testimony is fully corroborated by Peter, Paul, James, and by the spirit of the entire New Testament.

At this point some one may object, saying: "Yes, but I do not accept the statements of the Bible as inspired or as the word of God." Very well! For

the time being, we will reject them as inspired narratives, but we cannot in reason refuse to accept them as reliable history, just as we accept historical statements touching Socrates, Plato, Pericles. The men who wrote these histories were honest, God-fearing men, and this is surely as much as can be said of Suetonius or Xenophon, possibly a trifle more. If we accept the latter as trustworthy, it is more than unreasonable to reject the former.

Matthew, an honest man, with an unimpeachable character, who was freely conversant with the facts, says in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of his Gospel that one Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Roman soldiers just outside the city of Jerusalem; that, probably in derision, they put a placard above his head on which was written, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews"; that he suffered much, hanging there in death agony for many hours, and that he finally died.

He testifies that his death was accompanied by darkness and convulsions of nature that disturbed the city greatly, leading the Roman centurion, who watched every incident in the tragedy with vivid interest to say boldly, "Truly this was the Son of God."

He says further, that at the close of the day, Jesus having died about the middle of the afternoon, one Joseph, a rich man of Arimathæa, went to Pilate, begged the dead body of Jesus, received it, wrapped it in the linen shroud common to his day, laid it in a new tomb, and caused a heavy stone to be rolled over the tomb's mouth.

He says that the scribes and Pharisees went to Pilate and said that, while he was yet alive, Jesus, whom they called a deceiver, had declared that after three days he would rise again. To avoid the possibility of his followers' stealing away his body and saying that he had risen, they urged that a capable guard be set. Willing to please them a little further, Pilate said: "Ye have a guard: go, make it as sure as ye can." They determined to take no chances, so they closed the tomb with a seal, to break which meant death, and set relays of Roman soldiers to guard against fraud of any kind. Jesus was dead, buried in a sealed tomb, and his body guarded by Roman soldiers.

In the same dispassionate phrase this early historian says that certain of Jesus' followers went to his tomb early on the third day, found it not only open, but empty, and that Jesus, looking much as he did before his death—but different enough to excite their awe and reverence—appeared unto certain of his closest disciples, convincing them slowly, but at length surely, that he was alive again.

This, in substance, is the account given by each of the other historians. Mark breaks over his customary brevity and gives the facts almost as fully as Matthew. Luke adds the incident of the thief who repented while on the cross and sought the favor of the Rabbi suffering with him. John, closest friend of Jesus, writing much later than the first three, after criticism had begun to particularize, adds the significant fact that, in order to be sure that Jesus was dead,

a soldier thrust a spear into his side, letting out his life blood.

There is no note of uncertainty. Each historian knows his facts from personal observation and writes with a firm, strong stroke. Either these four men wrote what was true or they are the most unprincipled, barefaced frauds and deceivers this world has ever known—an alternative that few, if any, will for one moment accept.

But this is not all. In addition to the facts set forth by three or four men, every other New Testament writer either mentions the resurrection of Jesus or his message rests upon it as a foundation. To take out the resurrection of our Lord would leave the New Testament a spineless volume, like a body without a bony structure to give it form. The man who rejects the resurrection of Jesus must, if he is logical, reject the entire gospel, for without it the gospel is without virility and substance.

Concerning the Physical Body of Jesus.

A second strong proof of the resurrection of the Nazarene lies in the simple fact that his dead body, wrapped in its mummy-like winding sheet, placed in a rock-closed tomb, sealed with the governor's signet ring and guarded by a relay of Roman soldiers, was not there when his disciples reached the tomb early in the morning of the third day. Apart from the theory of resurrection, what became of the body of Jesus? This apparently simple question becomes complex and unanswerable the moment it is raised.

Clearly its disappearance cannot be charged to the Roman guard whose very lives depended upon its safe-keeping. It cannot be laid at the door of the scribes and Pharisees, for they feared that very thing and created a condition rendering the disappearance impossible. Only his disciples remain of those who could have any interest in the matter. To say that that little company of sorrowing, stunned, helpless, unarmed disciples overcame a powerfully armed Roman guard, broke the governor's seal and rifled the tomb of Jesus, is to commit a folly of which no reasonable man will be guilty. To accept the trumped-up story that the disciples came by night while the guards slept (a breach of military discipline which no soldier would for a moment confess), made all the disturbance necessary to break open a stone-sealed tomb and carried away a body without waking the guard, is equally untenable.

On the groundless hypothesis that the disciples secured the dead body of Jesus, what did they do with it? If such a theft had been committed under such circumstances, no foot of the Roman Empire would have escaped the searchers. That none of them took his body away is further proved by the fact that the disciples were all in Jerusalem that day and met together for conference in the evening. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead as the Bible contends, the disappearance of his body is absolutely unexplainable.

The Amazement of the Disciples.

Following close upon the foregoing proof is the

fact that Jesus' disciples did not expect him to rise from the dead, that they refused to believe it until disbelief was no longer possible, and that when they finally did accept it, the magnitude and importance of it so laid hold upon them that they made it the chief note in their preaching and held to it even in the face of threatened death.

In no age have men thrown away their lives unnecessarily, nor have they uselessly exposed themselves to the wrath of enemies. The outstanding note in the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost, so short a time after it occurred, was the resurrection of Jesus. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts 2:22-24.) If this event had not occurred Peter must have been a genius indeed to formulate it so perfectly, in so short a time, and a giant in courage to throw such a charge into the faces of listening, quick-tempered Jews.

Likewise Paul in defending himself against false charges in Jerusalem (Acts, chapters 23, 24, 26) dwelt much upon the resurrection. Once a reference to the resurrection saved him from bodily violence. (Acts 23:6-10.) Before Felix he said that he had done nothing wrong and nothing with which the Jews had

any right to find fault, unless it be that he had cried while standing among them, "Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day." (Acts 24: 18-21.)

In his masterly defense before Agrippa he said: "And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?" (Acts 26: 6-8.) These words are from Saul of Tarsus, fully grown when the resurrection occurred, the best educated, sanest, most reasonable young man of his day. Do you think such a man could be mistaken or would take such a stand unless fully convinced? Nor can a reasoning man turn lightly from the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, written by Paul twenty-five years after the resurrection, when all the facts were fresh in his mind and all sources had been heard from. Let those who remember so vividly the events of the Civil War, now nearly half a century past, judge whether Paul could remember the circumstances surrounding such an event as this when scarcely half the time had elapsed.

In this mighty chapter Paul says: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the

twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8.)

Let us take time just here to enjoy Paul's song of triumph at the close of his masterly discussion: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:53, 54.) This great man of the first century, who had every facility for knowing the facts, who could not have been fooled and who would not state an untruth, says over and over again that Jesus rose from the dead. Can you refuse to believe it?

Five Hundred Witnesses.

Will you grasp the significance of the statement from Paul, quoted above, that in addition to being seen after his resurrection by all the apostles, he was seen and recognized by over five hundred other brethren at one time? Suppose it were reported in your town that some important personage, say the mayor, had gone to Hongkong. The papers all contained a full write-up of the proposed trip and the requisite number of prominent citizens had seen him off on the train;—there was no doubt about it: the mayor

went to Hongkong! But suppose the third day after, twelve of the most trustworthy men among you testified that they had seen him in his own city. Would you believe he had come back? You might doubt it a little. But suppose a hundred men said they had seen him. Suppose the number increased to two hundred, to three hundred, to five hundred. Five hundred reliable men testify that they had seen the mayor back home! No matter how incredible it would seem, you would be forced to believe he was back. Five hundred men could not be deceived, nor would they unite in telling an untruth.

Well, in addition to all the other evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, and all the prophecies that he would rise, in addition to his own declaration that he would, and the otherwise unexplainable empty tomb, in addition to the testimony of the eleven men who were true to him and who knew him best, we have the testimony of five hundred other reliable men who say they saw him alive. However much this may go against your thought of what might be, can you any longer doubt?

The Testimony of the Apostles.

On the possibility that some may still be uncertain let us resolve ourselves into a court and, with no thought of irreverence, call one or two apostles before us to find out what they know of the resurrection of Jesus. First, let us call Peter.

"Peter, did you know this man Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth?"

"Yes, I knew him well."

"How long did you know him?"

"Upwards of three years."

"Were you much with him during that time?"

"I was continually with him, night and day."

"Did you know of his crucifixion?"

"I did."

"Did you witness it?"

"I did."

"Are you convinced he died on the cross?"

"I am."

"Did you see him buried?"

"I did."

"Now Peter, think well before you answer. Have you ever seen him since?"

"I have, many times."

"You may tell the court your story."

Tears fill the eyes of the aged witness and after a struggle to control himself he proceeds:

"Well, you must understand that this Jesus was very precious to me. I had lively hopes that he was the promised Messiah, but when he allowed himself to be crucified and I saw him buried, I gave that all up and supposed I had been mistaken. With a group of his followers I had been up all Sabbath night. We were too sorrowful and too disappointed to sleep. Just as the first gray streaks of light announced the new day, I was amazed to hear the shrill voice of Mary Magdalene cry out that the tomb in which we had so recently laid the wrapped body of Jesus was open and that she had seen him alive. Of course we did not believe her. That would be too much. Her words

seemed to us like idle talk. But soon other women came and confirmed the report of the Magdalene. They were so sure they were right that John and I started on the run to see if it could be true. He outran me, but waited at the tomb till I came up. Sure enough, it was open and empty. There was no sign of the Roman guard or that violence had been used in opening the tomb. I began to waver and wonder if the women had really seen him alive. One thing after another throughout the day confirmed the rumor and when we apostles were all together in the evening, he came into the room and spoke to us in a voice that could have belonged to no one else. Since then I have seen him and talked with him many times. The event has transformed my life and I shall spend the rest of it telling men about him and his salvation."

Counsel for the opposition here suggests that we call Thomas. Thomas is no sentimentalist, or rattle-brain. He has often expressed his doubts about the genuineness of this man's claims and there is no fear of his being carried away by fanatical reports. What Thomas says we may safely believe.

"Thomas, did you know this man Jesus, the reputed son of Joseph of Nazareth?"

"Yes."

"How well did you know him?"

"Well, I was with him constantly for a little over three years."

"Could you not be fooled about him; could you be made to think you saw him when it was some one else?"

"Oh, no. That could not be. He was so unusual.

He looked like no one else. No one who ever knew him could be mistaken about him."

"Do you believe he was crucified?"

"I know he was."

"Did you see him buried?"

"Yes, and the tomb sealed, the Roman guard set."

"Now Thomas, everything hangs on the answer to the next question. We have had several men before the court who have said they knew he was alive. We know you are level-headed and calm. You know men do not rise from the dead. You say you saw this man crucified and buried. Do you think he is alive?"

"I know he is."

"What?"

"I know he is."

"Thomas, this is most extraordinary. You may tell the court how you know this man is alive."

Thomas' face lights up at the opportunity and he says in clear and steady voice:

"Well, you may know that I have been called The Doubter with respect to the claims of Jesus. They were so unusual and startling that I did not accept one of them until they were so proved to me I could no longer doubt. I even began to hope that he was the promised Messiah, but when he was crucified and buried my hopes all faded and I said I would be slower still to believe the next time.

"I was not with the disciples the first time he appeared to them and, of course, I did not believe they had seen him. It went on that way for a whole week. I felt sure the disciples had been so broken with sor-

row and watching that they were beside themselves, but one evening we were together again and he came into the room. Even then I would not believe it was really Jesus. Finally I did a daring thing, I said: 'If this is really our former Master there are certain marks on his body caused by the crucifixion and spear thrust. If these show I will believe.' Instantly he said: 'Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands.' I did so, and sure enough, there were the holes. Before I could regain myself he pushed back his loose robe and said: 'Reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side.' I shrank from this, but I was so anxious and excited I did thrust in my hand and the awful hole was there, deep, deep; it seemed I could almost touch his heart. How could I doubt any longer? I fell on my face and cried out, 'My Lord and my God!' With no note of chiding, but with much anxiety and anticipation, he said: 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' (John 20: 24-29.) I was uncertain before but I can be so no longer. I shall give the remainder of my life to preaching his gospel."

So it goes through the whole list of apostles. None of them expected he would rise again. They were convinced against their thought of the possible but when convinced, the stupendous nature of the event and its far-reaching effects so laid hold upon them that they made the day of his resurrection their day of worship and immediately dedicated themselves to preaching his gospel and building up the church. No

stronger proof of Christ's resurrection exists than this sudden and otherwise unexplainable transformation of his sorrowing disciples and their new and absolute consecration to his cause.

How the World's Rest Day Was Changed.

We shall find further proof of the resurrection of our Lord in the sudden change at that time from the Sabbath to Sunday as a day of rest and worship. From the beginning of recorded history, the seventh day of the week had been the Sabbath, the day of rest, worship, spiritual upbuilding. The Jewish people of Christ's time were the most conservative the world had ever seen. They settled more and more tightly in their religious practices and would not change the customs of their fathers even though a Christ should tell them the time had come to do so. To ask them to change their day of worship would be like asking them to change their natures, which they could not do any more than a leopard could change his spots. Suddenly, however, many of them did change in this thing that meant most to them. They rested and worshiped God and held all their religious services, not on Sabbath but on Sunday.

What world event could have occurred to so emphasize the first day of the week as to lead these Jews to forsake without a struggle or apparent regret, the ancient Sabbath and transfer all its sacred observances to Sunday? What indeed but the resurrection of Jesus? Only such an event can account for this remarkable change.

The Living, Potent Influence of Jesus.

Near the close of his earthly life our Lord had a long talk with his disciples during which he said: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." And this further certainly by implication: "My kingdom so far is local; confined. It must be universal. So long as I remain in the flesh I can touch but a few lives; but when I throw off the limitations of the flesh, then by my living Spirit I can touch millions and my service will be to the whole race."

The influence of Jesus Christ in the world to-day is that of a living personality. The memory of a young rabbi who died nineteen hundred years ago could never have transformed the world as has his Spirit. It is amazing how quickly great men are forgotten, how quickly their power fades when they are dead. The name of Napoleon whom all Europe dreaded while he lived, could not start a single spirit a year after he was dead. The Chinese empress, living, could sway four hundred million people and keep the world on tiptoe; dead less than a year, her name does not cause a ripple on the sea of the world's affairs.

If Jesus had remained in that rock-hewn tomb, the world would have forgotten him within a hundred years; but living, acting, he is the mightiest force in the world twenty centuries after he ceased to walk the earth, and at his throne to-day, one third of the human race bows in loving submission.

To Sum All Up.

"The resurrection of Jesus is the best-attested fact of history." Do you believe it now? The testimony of the four reliable historians; of the apostles who were closest to him and knew the facts by seeing as well as by inspiration; the unaccountable disappearance of his body from a stone-sealed, Roman-guarded tomb; the fact that his own disciples did not expect him to rise, but were forced to believe in his resurrection after indisputable evidence; the fact that the truth once believed transformed their lives and sent them forth, zealous preachers of his gospel; the fact that over five hundred reliable witnesses saw him alive and openly testified of it; the otherwise unaccountable change from the Sabbath to the first day of the week as a day of rest and worship; the potent, active influence of Jesus in the world of men ever since he broke the bonds of death—these incontrovertible proofs must swing us over to him, and, seeing that he conquered death for himself, force us to believe he can conquer it for every man who will trust him.

Surely Victor Hugo is right. "The tomb is not a blind alley. It is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open in the dawn."

Since he has passed through, since he holds the key of the mighty mystery and is willing to impart it to us, let us trust him, follow him, love him, until we see his face in our Father's house.

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

MAY I KNOW WHETHER OR NOT I HAVE COMMITTED IT?

VII

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

MAY I KNOW WHETHER OR NOT I HAVE COMMITTED IT?

A Sin-Pardoning God.

The willingness of God to forgive the sins of men is among the most widely and constantly preached of all the messages of the gospel. Like a gleaming arc in a night of blackness, this willingness shines forth. To the sinsick it is a veritable Pharos inviting them into a harbor of release and safety. The gospel would be robbed of its vitality if the messenger of the great King could not say to all men "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18.)

Man is even told exactly what he needs to do to obtain forgiveness: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7.)

Christ forever won the heart of weak and sinning humanity when he declared he had not come to earth to help the perfect man, but the man of faults and im-

perfections. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2: 17).

How many a life has been lifted back to respectability and new usefulness by these promises! John Calvin testifies that as a youth he suddenly came under deep conviction of sin. There was no rest for him day or night, at home or abroad. One day as he walked in the wood meditating on his wretched state, there came to him, as a voice from heaven, the words of Isaiah quoted above: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Realizing suddenly that that promise was for him, just as much as other men, he leaped for joy and nevermore carried the burden he then laid upon the willing shoulders of his Lord.

It is the glory of the minister that he may preach forgiveness of sins to the whole world. There are many fascinating phases of the gospel, but none more so than this. Spurgeon declared that though his sermons were upon every subject in Scripture, there was never one in which the sinner could not find Christ and the promise of forgiveness of sins.

The Startling Exception.

In view of all this, the student of the word of God is amazed to find that this rich promise of forgiveness of sins lacks one of being universal! All sins may be forgiven, save one. What could that sin be? He concludes at once, and rightly, that it must be something of vital importance and he may be pardoned for won-

dering if he has committed it. Here is the statement. Jesus is speaking:

"Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." (Matthew 12:31, 32.)

This remarkable utterance of Jesus makes clear two things. First, that, with the exception of one, all sins of men—secret sins and open sins, sins of the mind as well as sins of the body—upon penitence and request, will be forgiven. Yes, such is the generosity of God that the blackest sins man can commit, theft, adultery, even murder, all sins the weakness or vileness of man may commit, he will forgive. Oh! the boundless love and mercy of God. Does it not touch your heart now, as you think of it?

Then it is made clear, secondly, that this sin which will not be forgiven is very different from all others. It is not a sin against one's self, nor his fellow-man, nor yet against God or his Son Jesus; it is a sin against the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Some one may say: "Oh, well! that lifts the matter clear out of the realm of man's understanding. I know what you mean when you talk of the sins of the flesh, even the sins of the mind, but to speak of sin against a spirit is entirely beyond my comprehension."

Let us see. In the first place Jesus did not speak

of a sin against a spirit, but of the sin against the Holy Spirit. What is the office and work of the Holy Spirit? According to the Scripture it is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us (John 16: 14), to call to remembrance all things that Christ commanded while he was on earth (John 14: 26), to move men's hearts to an acceptance of God's love and Jesus Christ as Saviour. (John 6: 44.) He is now in the place of Jesus Christ, striving to reconcile sinning men to God. Our worst sin against the Holy Spirit would be to refuse to listen to his message, to reject his call, to declare by our actions that we do not believe what he says. What worse blasphemy could there be than this?

Now when to this thought we add the one already known, that only those who finally reject the offer of Jesus Christ to grant them salvation remain unforgiven and are lost, we are driven to the conclusion that the sin against the Holy Spirit, the one sin that will not be forgiven, is to continually reject his pleading and refuse to accept Christ as our Saviour.

The Old Testament Supports This Contention.

Away back in Genesis God spoke a warning word. "My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever." (Genesis 6: 3.) What can this mean but that, having urged a man for years to accept God's plan for his salvation and having been refused and rejected over and over again, the Holy Spirit will one day take the man's answer as final and cease striving, leaving the man to his fate? It is a fearful thing to say "No"

to God. "Come now, saith Jehovah, and let us reason together." "No," says man, "I will not reason. I will do exactly what I please whether God likes it or not." Just as the stubborn child that will not listen to the admonition of a wise parent must suffer for its folly, so the man must suffer who refuses to obey God.

Many well-known passages of Scripture confirm this idea. In Proverbs 1:24-31, Divine Wisdom speaks thus:

"Because I have called, and ye have refused;
I have stretched out my hand, and no man hath regarded;
But ye have set at nought all my counsel,
And would none of my reproof:
I also will laugh in the day of your calamity;
I will mock when your fear cometh;
When your fear cometh as a storm,
And your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind;
When distress and anguish come upon you.
Then will they call upon me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me.
For that they hated knowledge,
And did not choose the fear of Jehovah,
They would none of my counsel,
They despised all my reproof;
Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be filled with their own devices."

The Old Testament teems with assurances that God is love and that only those who finally reject his mercy shall perish. Had there been ten worthy men in the great city of Gomorrah, he would have saved the whole city for their sakes. (Genesis 18:16-33.) Through the Prophet Isaiah he says to his people: "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land," while only "if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword." (Isaiah 1:19, 20.)

In the New Testament there are further utterances that strikingly confirm our position. "A man that hath set at nought Moses' law (the way of salvation under the Old Dispensation) dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28, 29.)

In his marvelous defense against false accusers the martyr Stephen cried out: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye." (Acts 7:51.)

In view of these clear utterances of Scripture we are driven to the conclusion that it is the soul that continues to reject the pleas of the Holy Spirit that he shall accept Christ and the love of God that is committing the unpardonable sin. This continued rejection is the only sin that condemns a man to eternal death and the pains of hell.

Are you committing this sin? Of course you know it if you are. If you are, you see also that you can stop it instantly, if you will. Now, while you read, you can take forever from your soul the curse rising from rejection of the Spirit's call. Without irreverence, in view of the mercy of God, you can force open the book of life and write your name upon it. Will you not do it now? It is the Saviour who pleads with you.

HOW MAY I KNOW THAT MY SINS ARE FORGIVEN?

VIII

HOW MAY I KNOW THAT MY SINS ARE FORGIVEN?

The Universality and Blight of Sin.

The universality of transgression is perhaps the most freely admitted fact in human experience. If sin is not "original" with the race, it certainly is with the individual. To sin man needs no exposure as to a contagious disease; no education that he may know its devious ways; no guide as to a strange country. If man lives, he sins, be the theories about sin's origin what they may.

Paul made this plain in his letter to the Romans. "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10.) "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) John the beloved disciple who probably lived closer to the Master than any other man, said in his old age, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8.) Every servant of God mentioned in the Bible from Adam to the author of Revelation showed some want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Why man will persist in this thing which yields so much sorrow and so little satisfaction, that blights and damns his life, it is indeed impossible to say.

The Scourge of Outraged Conscience.

A second universally acknowledged fact is that it is impossible to outwit or outrun the monitor our Creator has set within us. The human conscience is a most sensitive organ. While its first office seems to be to tell man what is right and what is wrong in human conduct, it is not content with that, but follows the transgressor with whips and scorpions, condemning him for his sin and driving him toward penitence. Whether one conceives of it as the voice of God or an emanation from his own soul, the result is the same.

In his agony David cried out to God (Psalm 139: 7-10):

"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me."

After breaking first the seventh and then the eighth commandment, when conscience was making life miserable, the mighty king of Israel fell on his face crying out (Psalm 51: 1-3):

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:

According to the multitude of thy tender mercies
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions;
And my sin is ever before me."

Literature contains no more striking picture of the torturing power of an outraged conscience than that of Arthur Dimmesdale, the beloved clergyman of Hawthorne's story "The Scarlet Letter." In a primitive community, of crude and unyielding laws, the minister had secretly committed a sin whose punishment was death and whose confession would bring shame not only upon himself, but also upon his sacred calling. Fear and dread sealed his lips, but a relentless conscience drove him to open confession. Standing before his people, he would tell them he was the blackest of sinners; if they knew all they would drag him from the pulpit. But, knowing only his new life of abstinence and sacrifice, they only chided themselves the more as they held up their own deeds beside his spotless life. Under lock and key, he kept a scourge with which he would in secret beat his own back until the blood flowed. At length—so we infer from the veiled story—he burned a scarlet letter into his own breast. But there was no relief. Not until he mounted the hated scaffold in the midst of his adoring people and made open confession of his sin did conscience give him any peace. The more sensi-

tive the soul, the more fierce will be the scourging; and no sinner ever escapes.

Can the gnawing of conscience be stopped? Can sufficient restitution ever be made? Can the stains of sin be washed away? And most of all, can a man know that his sins have been forgiven?

The Voice of Revelation Says, "Yes."

It is the glory of the gospel message that it preaches forgiveness of sins to every man who will turn from them, confess them and ask God to blot them out. The Old Testament abounds with the promise. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18.)

Again: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7.)

In the New Testament Jesus declares again and again that the chief purpose of his coming into the world was to help sinning men to get away from their sin and get back to God. (Luke 19: 10.) "They that are whole have no need of a physician," he said again and again, "but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2: 17.)

The Saviour's opinion of the relative value of forgiveness of sins as compared to any other blessing he might bestow is clearly indicated by his action when

four friends carried the man sick of the palsy and laid him at the Saviour's feet. Jesus must have known their desire was for a physical healing but what he said was: "Son, thy sins are forgiven." He finally healed his body also, but not until he had made it plain that a greater benefit had already been bestowed. (Mark 2: 1-12.)

The apostles declared they had been instructed by Christ to preach forgiveness of sins to the whole world. As Peter told the Gentile Cornelius of Christ and his life-giving message, he said: "And he charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins. (Acts 10:42, 43.)

From these passages of Scripture, which are but types of hundreds more of like import, two things are clearly established:

First, God is not only willing to forgive our sins. He is eager to do it. By his Spirit he is constantly seeking men out and urging them to repentance that he may forgive them.

Second, the question as to whether man's sins will be forgiven or not rests with himself. God is ready to do his part whenever man is ready to do his. In fact it may be said, God's part is already done but it does not become effective in a particular case until the sinner repents and asks to be forgiven. In modern granaries two actions are necessary before the grain

can be secured. One is to fill the bin. The grain runs down the chute and stands there, ready to flow out in a copious stream as soon as the vent is opened. But the stock would starve if nothing else were done. Tons of feed might thus be standing ready but it would allay no hunger. Not until the stockman comes and does his part, opening the vent through which the food pours out, will the stock be benefited. The channel of God's mercy reaches from heaven to earth, and it is full, but that mercy can flow forth and benefit man only when he turns to God in true penitence and asks forgiveness.

A Word About Method.

Now as to the method of receiving this coveted forgiveness, and knowing that you have received it. The New Testament declares that three acts are necessary on man's part. They are not always named in the same order and, indeed, their order is not the vital part. Do them in any order that appeals to you or fits your case—but do them you must.

REPENT. This is the act usually put first, as it was by John the Baptist. "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2.) John "came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins." (Luke 3: 3.) Jesus, immediately after his temptation, took up John's strain crying: "Repent ye, and believe in the gospel." (Matthew 4: 17. Mark 1:

15.) In Paul's great sermon at Athens he cried out: "God . . . now . . . commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." (Acts 17:30.)

The essential element in repentance is deep and genuine sorrow for sin, for things done or for things left undone. The last may be as great a sin as the first. Repentance comes oftenest when one is made to see how good and worthy of obedience God is and how hateful and heinous in his sight is our transgression. When one comes to realize that his sin is separating him from God and preventing communion with him and when he craves to have his sin forgiven, not so much that he may escape the pain of punishment, but be restored to God's favor and to blessed communion with him, then man will be sorry indeed and will genuinely repent.

CONFESS. From the very outset confession of sins has ever preceded their forgiveness. "If we confess our sins," said the aged John, "he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) Man must acknowledge that he has done wrong, that he has broken the laws of God. This, with many men, is the hardest thing they have to do. They know they have done wrong but they are proud or self-righteous. They have stood out against God and his representatives so long they cannot bring themselves to say now that they have been wrong. And yet, why not be a man about it? Why not acknowledge this as quickly as any other fact of which you are now convinced?

It is the manly, courageous thing to do. It shows that your repentance is genuine.

BELIEVE. The third thing necessary to receive forgiveness of sins is to believe on Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our Saviour, our propitiation, for it is on his merit and not our own that God in justice can forgive us. As Peter told the Gentiles of Christ he declared: "Every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10: 43.)

The merit of Jesus, great as it was, was not needed for himself for he had not sinned. The little merit we may acquire is not sufficient to cover our transgressions. We must in some way get part of the merit of Jesus put over to our credit. We get this by believing in him and taking him as our Saviour.

Repent, Confess, Believe.

These are the three vital things. Turn them around if you will and believe, confess and repent. Have you done these things with respect to your sins? Do you continue to do them as you continue to sin? If you do, you may know that your sins are forgiven.

The Mar of Sin.

While God's forgiveness saves us from the eternal spiritual consequences of our sins and makes it possible for us to be at peace and happy in our Saviour's presence, it does not prevent the awful ravage of sin in our physical lives. John B. Gough was undoubtedly forgiven for the sin of drunkenness, but he never got

over the blight and curse of the practice with which he filled his early days. David was forgiven by God for the sins of adultery and murder, but he had few happy earthly days afterward and they surely hastened his death. So I guess we had better not sin.

MUST I NOT BECOME A BETTER MAN BEFORE I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

IX

MUST I NOT BECOME A BETTER MAN BEFORE I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Some Things We Know.

We are all visited with frequent convictions that we ought to be better men than we are. However grievously other men may misjudge us or however completely we may deceive the world as to our real condition, we know ourselves. We know, further, that right living is possible. We see men here and there who have unquestionably mastered their lower natures and are living the clean, moral lives we love to see. In America where Christianity, with its fostering of educational interests and all benevolent institutions, its creation of lofty standards, and its upward pull on all social customs, creates an impressive atmosphere, we are led to feel that we ought to become Christians. Our conception of Christianity is exalted, and rightly so. Its Founder moved among men in complete harmony with the pure and exalted standards of God. We believe he stated only the truth who said: "Christ is God's idea of what a man should be." When one looks at himself, sees his own transgressions, is conscious of his own unworthiness, it is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that the question is asked: "Must I not become a better man before I become a Christian? Must

I not gradually put away evil and begin to practice good? Must I not do all I can to save myself first?"

The Man Christ Is After.

We ask this question in all honesty and with all seriousness, and yet, when reduced to its simplest form, it is on a par with the question: "Must I not get well before I take this medicine?" Just as it is the office of medicine to help men get well, so it is the business of Christianity to help men be good. Matthew tells us of Christ's intimate intercourse with transgressors. When criticised for his action, the Saviour said: "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. . . . I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9: 12, 13.) Christ came to earth, not to hold together and preserve inviolate a few favored men who were already saved, but he came to save men who were sinning. He was not unappreciative of the ninety and nine just men, but his heart went out in greatest fullness to the one, who, tempted beyond his strength, was wandering in the wilderness of disobedience. He is the one power that, like a lever, pries under our old life of sin and helps us to throw it off.

Christ Greater than Satan.

We are all conscious that it is the spirit of Satan in us that makes us sin. Against his subtlety many of us find ourselves too weak; his shafts find the one opening in our armor. Could we drive his spirit out, we might hope to be masters of ourselves. Matthew tells us of

Christ's power over Satan. A father falls upon his knees before the Saviour and cries: "Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is epileptic, and suffereth grievously; for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and ofttimes into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him." With deep grief in his heart, the Saviour said to his disciples: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?" Then, turning to the father: "Bring him hither to me."

The sequel is simply told: "Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him; and the boy was cured from that hour." (Matthew 17:15-18.)

Let Christ into your life, and he will drive Satan out. Men are powerless to help us in this fight with principalities and powers, with the world rulers of this darkness by which we are surrounded. It requires the help of the One who is Master of them as well as of us, and at whose words they flee away as the mists before the rising sun.

No man ever fought a braver fight for self-control than did the Apostle Paul. After years of struggling, he discovered that when he depended upon his own power of resistance, or on the help of other men to keep him from sinning, he failed. Indeed he found the difficulty to be within himself. He confessed that the good he would do he did not, but the evil which he would not do, that he did. He found a law that when he would do good, evil was present with him. He delighted in the law of God after the inward man, but he saw a different law in his members, warring

against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin which was in his members. In his despair he cried out: "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" There was but one answer. He had tried all powers, both within and without. Only one had proved efficient: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:24, 25.)

One Who Knows the Way.

When in a difficulty, we need some one who is familiar with the situation to help us out. A party of tourists were last year visiting the catacombs of St. Sebastian, just out of Rome on the Appian Way. With a little old Latin Father to guide them, they went in safety through the labyrinthine chambers composing that underground city of the dead. Each one discovered for himself that if he were to lose sight of the little candle in the hand of the guide, he would be utterly lost, so far as his own ability to get out of his predicament were concerned; that his only hope for escape from those dungeons was to keep in close touch with the only one in the party who knew every pathway and could lead all out again into the sunlight. There is many a man leading a life of sin to-day who would get out of it if he knew how. He associates with men who know as little about the way of escape as himself. Like freezing men in a storm, they walk in circles. I tell of One who can lead you out; who does not walk in circles. He knows the way. I urge you to turn from all others and follow his lead.

The Law Superseded by Grace.

You cannot become a Christian simply by becoming a better man. It is a different thing entirely. I speak of this because the idea is expressed continually by men who are urged to take up the new life of Christ Jesus, that they will favorably consider the matter, gradually introduce more and more good into their lives until finally, by their own efforts, they make themselves Christians. Paul makes it clear that there has been a change since the days of the Mosaic Law. "For ye are not under law," he says, "but under grace." (Romans 6:14). Formerly men might get back to God by becoming good men—by fulfilling the law. But that was a temporary arrangement, added because of man's transgression and meant to operate only until time for the coming of Christ. True, it led men up to Christ, as a tutor prepares a man for college, but, just as when a man gets into college, he no longer uses the tutor, so, since Christ has come, we no longer get back to God by law. The grace of God has been substituted for the work of man. Since Christ came as the Saviour of men, we must come to God by him. We have no choice in the matter. "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and he only is born again, as the Scripture tells us, who "believeth that Jesus is the Christ."

Cause or Result?

This is not to say that a man may become a Christian and continue in his sins, nor is it to say that his

efforts to make himself a better man are not important. "Christian" and "Sin" are two words inherently hostile. No man who truly becomes a Christian would think of continuing the sins he freely indulged during his worldly life. John the Baptist came to the people of Judæa preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. A man who is truly born from above immediately begins to right the wrongs he has committed during his life of disobedience. Almost daily the papers record the receipt by the treasurer of the Conscience Fund at Washington of money from men who have found Christ and begun a new life in him and are eager to make right the evils of their former days as far as possible. Good works are the result of a Christian birth, and never the cause of it.

To-day, if Ye Will Hear His Voice.

Furthermore, let us confess frankly to ourselves that no man knows whether he will have a chance to make himself better or not. Our age does not believe in scaring men into the kingdom, but as fully as any preceding age, we know the simple fact that our hold upon time is uncertain and determined by powers other than our own. Evermore the Saviour reiterated his warning: "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour."

During the World's Fair in Chicago, the great steamship known as the "Whaleback" started one bright October morning from Van Buren Street to the Fair Grounds. She carried four thousand happy people

anticipating a day in that wonderful White City. When scarcely half a mile from the pier, the hoarse whistle gave the startling intelligence that a man had fallen overboard. A moment before he was well and hearty, anticipating a full measure of life. The whistle called attention to the fact that he was underneath the waves of Lake Michigan, now churned to whiteness by the attempt of the ship to lessen her speed. Quickly a boat was put out, soon a life-saving crew was seen rowing with all swiftness from the shore, but though they rode the waves above the point of his disappearance for hours, no sign of the lifeless body rewarded their eager gazing. "In an hour that ye think not."

One March morning a fast passenger train on a trunk line through Iowa was rushing on its way, assuming a clear track. That morning an aged man was passing over the track for a visit with his daughter—a visit he had made daily for many years without harm. He had been a busy man, too busy, he thought, to prepare for the future, but now he had quit active work and was looking forward to the enjoyment of many days in the rest he had so well earned. He was going to think about becoming a Christian. He did not hear or see the approaching engine until he was grasped in its swift embrace. Then, in an instant of time, all plans for reformation perished. "Now is the accepted time."

Nor can a man assume that because he has reached middle life, having passed through many dangers, he is immune to accident. One of the most active men of

the five hundred or more who went on the World's Fifth Sunday School Convention cruise to Jerusalem in 1904 was the Rev. Robert B. Taylor, of San Diego, California. For ten or twelve years he had been as much at home upon the water as on the land. Fearless, cautious, level-headed, a strong swimmer, he felt himself safe from all danger of drowning. But soon after his return from this journey of over twenty thousand miles, when yachting with friends only a few miles from his own door, he lost his footing on the deck, and fell into the sea. The tide was rushing swiftly out, and, before the boat could be brought about and driven to where he was struggling to keep his head above the waves, his strength failed and he sank to his death in the sea he loved so well.

Take no chance on the future: "Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow . . . For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that." (James 4: 13, 15.)

My Spirit Shall Not Always Strive.

To the uncertainty of time must be added an even more arousing truth. Very early in his dealings with his earthly children God cautioned them against delaying their coming to him by this plain declaration: "My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever." (Genesis 6: 3.) Impulses to righteousness pass by, and the man who to-day refuses to respond to the noble promptings of his own soul may never again have

these promptings to move him toward this desired action. W. T. Stead has told of his experience at Silcoat's Hall, a boys' school near Wakefield, England, where he pursued a preparatory course. Once, while he was at school, there was unusual religious interest. Of the fifty boys there, forty professed conversion. Only half a dozen held aloof from the movement; these were prayed for jointly and severally, by their converted comrades. Note well Mr. Stead's words: "Although the tone of the school was kept up at a high level, and although the prayer meeting was kept going, and the solid fruits of the revival lasted all the time I was there, we never had another conversion after that strange outpouring of the Spirit which overwhelmed us all, unexpectant, at the beginning of the term. Those who were brought in during the revival week stood firm, for the most part; those who stood out against the revival never came in afterwards."

The Condition in Which Christ Would Have Men Come.

There is one thing more which should be said: most men who try to make themselves better men before they become Christians, fail. I have watched the process over and over again, and the result is, almost without exception, the same. A man is moved to righteousness. Some memory of a clean life in youth or some message from the Unseen urges him to leave the old life and become a new man. He reasons with himself. "I must straighten up. I will draw away

from the companions who have been pulling me down, will quit the meanness in which I have been engaged, and, ultimately, when I have lived without sin long enough, I will become a Christian. But I will do this gradually, lest I be charged with hypocrisy, which of all things I hate." Like a man crossing a creek on a very narrow log, he tries to hold to the trees on the one side until he is able freely to grasp those upon the other. But he cannot succeed. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." As sinning men we are too weak to stand the temptations that are poured down upon us. There must be a complete break with the old life and a complete stand in the new life. (Ephesians 4: 20-24.) "But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

"Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

CAN I KNOW WHETHER OR NOT I HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN?

X

CAN I KNOW WHETHER OR NOT I HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN?

The Cry of an Anxious Soul.

In a private room of a hospital in a western city, a young woman lay dying of the white plague. The hectic flush, the cold sweat, the weak voice, all told the pitiful story. The visiting clergyman read from the only book. "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you." He led in prayer, committing the fluttering spirit into the welcoming hands of the Father. When about to go he turned to say farewell. "One moment, doctor," pleaded the failing voice. "There is one question I have wanted to ask somebody for years. I have thought about it so much. Of course I am resigned and ready to die, but"—and the voice almost failed,—"is there any way I can know whether or not I have been born again?"

However indifferent the robust man may be about the things of the future, there will come a time when he will want to know. Only a crisis will force from the lips the question of the dying woman, yet every faithful pastor sees daily that it is in the hearts of his people. Can a man know whether or not he has been born again? If this question can be answered

in the affirmative, many an anxious heart will be set at rest.

Why the New Birth Is Necessary.

In Christ's talk with Nicodemus, he said: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." When the learned ruler expressed surprise, Christ said further: "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3: 3. 5.) Two elements, Jesus thus declared, have a place in the new birth. Putting away the old life,—symbolized by the washing with water,—and putting on the new life,—symbolized by the visitation of the Holy Spirit.

"The new birth stands at the beginning of the inward life, and baptism at the beginning of the corresponding outward life. And therefore Jesus could say with the utmost propriety: 'You must confess me openly in the prescribed way and you must also be the subject of a great spiritual change, which is represented by that confession, or you cannot enter the kingdom.' For the order of expression, which is rhetorical rather than logical, compare, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.'" (Romans 10:9.)[1]

Why Is One Not Born Again Unable to Enter the Kingdom of God?

The answer is simple: Because the man not born again is simply an intelligent, rational, perhaps highly

[1] Professor Harvey in the American Commentary.

moral animal and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (I Corinthians 15:50.)

How difficult it seems to be for man to grasp the fact that the kingdom of heaven is an entirely different type of kingdom from those of earth. Here all is flesh, there all is spirit. Man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven until he is reborn as spirit.

Can a Man Be Sure of His Own Spiritual Birth?

Yes, he can be as sure of this as he is of his own physical existence. Very many worthy men have such a definite experience at the time of their new birth that it is the best known of all things that have ever happened to them. They can name the day, the hour, the place, and give all the attendant circumstances in minute detail: how the burden of sin rolled away; how the heart suddenly throbbed as with new life; how they saw and understood the Saviour. As in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus, the light nearly blinds them, and many cannot refrain from walking and leaping and praising God. Blessed indeed are they who have such assurance.

But comparatively few Christians ever have such an experience. How are children born into Christian homes, brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, who have never been deep in sin, never felt its burden, who enter the church as naturally as they enter school, who never experience a great spiritual awakening,—how are they to know surely that they have been born again?

It may be known by the plain statements of Scripture, and by deduction from these. Take the passage quoted a moment ago: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9.) If you have complied with these conditions, believed in Jesus and have publicly confessed him, especially by joining the church, you may know you will be saved, and since to be saved it is necessary to be born again, you may know you have had that birth.

But we can come even closer. The young woman spoken of at the beginning of this chapter as dying without the assurance she craved, had been confirmed at twelve years of age, had always loved and trusted the Saviour, had continuously made public confession of him. Her visitor knew this and said at once: "Certainly you can know that you have been born again, know it as surely as you know your own name." Then, turning to 1 John 5:1, he read: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." "Oh!" she cried, "that is the most comforting thing that ever came into my life. Now I am satisfied. I am ready to go now; ready!" and she turned over to breathe her life away in the arms of her waiting Lord.

You know perfectly whether or not you believe Jesus to be the Christ. If you do not, you have not been born again, and if you do believe it you have been born again, whether any great consciousness of the fact ever swept over you or not. More things

can be positively known about the kingdom of God than the man of the world dreams. By the exercise of the same faculties and principles, he knows much about his business world which is denied the novice. As fast as he gets into the spirit of the kingdom of heaven he can know things about that also. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." He that knows some may know more and he that enters fully may know all that the spirit reveals. Christ said to his believing disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 13:11.)

IS IT NECESSARY TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH TO BE SAVED?

XI

IS IT NECESSARY TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH TO BE SAVED?

Criticism and Confusion.

We have fallen upon those evil days when the most sacred institutions are criticised by men who know little about them, yet, vested with a fleeting authority or wildly seeking notoriety, they air their half-baked opinions on every available occasion or every proffered page. A quarter of a century ago their voices would not have reached the public ear, but now, thanks to our craze for some new thing, they are heard and their cry has robbed many souls of their contentment. A favorite object of attack by these iconoclasts is the church of Jesus Christ, the organization to which were committed the oracles of God, the administration of the sealing ordinances and the carrying of the evangel to every quarter of the globe, that all men might be won to Christ. Some ten years ago a prominent religious journal contained this paragraph: "The man who denies himself somewhat for the sake of the church finds it 'the joy of the whole earth,' while he who rents in it a sitting for his wife; or visits it only when his father is buried or his child baptized, is pretty sure to find it narrow, bigoted and mean."[1] Critics of the church are

[1] *The Interior,* Chicago.

largely of this latter class, or, worse yet, of those who know nothing of the church from personal experience, but after a most superficial survey presume to tell the world whether it is good or bad.

Frequently, also, one is heard who boasts loudly of his love for and allegiance to Christ, but announces his indifference to or even his contempt for Christ's church. Such utterances have greatly confused many good men, and they are asking seriously, "Is the church the sacred institution I have always supposed it to be, and is it necessary to belong to the church to be saved?"

Jesus Declared His Intention of Founding the Church.

In the notable conversation which Jesus had with his disciples at Cæsarea Philippi they declared to him through their chief spokesman that they believed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Immediately and for the first time in so many words he announced to them that he would found a church, so firm and strong that all the powers of hell should not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13-18.)

From that time forward there was never a question but that those who came to believe on him and depend on him for salvation would be members of that institution. Their first act was to accept the ordinances of the church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. No one ever thought of being a Christian in those days and refusing to join the body of believers or to help push the work unto other lives.

Help from the New Testament.

While there are in the New Testament,—which was being written when the church was in its infancy,—few definite references to the question which heads this chapter, much may be gathered from the constant attitude of Jesus and his followers and from the fact that, as fast as converts were made by Paul and other early missionaries, they were gathered into an organization and a church founded.

Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of church membership put forth by Jesus himself was the fact that, although he did not consider the institution perfect in his day, he was nevertheless a member of it: Jesus was himself a member of the church. He felt that his religious life would be incomplete without the ordinance of baptism, which the church alone administers. (Matthew 3: 13-17.) He regularly attended its services, took part in them (Luke 4: 16); and paid his share toward its support. (Matthew 17: 24-27.) He was very jealous of the purity of the church, twice cleansing the temple at Jerusalem, by driving out grasping merchants, and declaring, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye make it a den of robbers." (Matthew 21: 13; John 2: 15; Mark 11: 15.) Remember this: In spite of its recognized imperfections, quite as many as may be found to-day, Jesus was a member of the church, attended its services regularly and supported it.

The Whole Teaching of Jesus Implies Church Membership.

While Jesus laid heartiest emphasis on the spirit in

which a man follows his religious life, all his teaching is on the clear assumption that there is to be a church and that his followers are to be members of it.

"Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14, 15.) This first message of Jesus contains four elements: "The time is fulfilled" indicates that God has a definite plan. "The kingdom of God is at hand" declares that there was to be an organization. There could be no kingdom without subjects, no church without members. "Repent" calls upon all men to turn from sin toward righteousness. "Believe in the gospel" declares that faith, ever fostered by the church, is to be an essential in the new organization.

In such instances Jesus acts as he does toward so many of the greatest facts touching the kingdom; he assumes church membership. He calls for duties and services which demand the church. Nothing he ever says or does suggests the contrary. Disciples who were depending upon him for eternal life were to identify themselves at once with his work on earth.

At one time a young man asked Jesus the direct question, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus gave a general answer, "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments." "Which?" said the young man. "All the old ones given by Moses," the Saviour replied, "and

one new one, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Thus quite as much effort and sacrifice were required as joining the church would entail. Then came the remarkable answer of the young man: "All these things have I observed: what lack I yet?" Said the Saviour: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." That is to say, disentangle yourself from worldly affairs, put away the things that bind you to the earth and give your first thought to the things of the kingdom. (Matthew 19: 16-30.)

From this striking incident we may gather that certain very elementary things only are necessary to eternal life, but that certain other things are necessary to the highest development in that life. The application of the incident to church membership is obvious.

The Church and the Great Commission.

At Cæsarea Philippi, when the disciples said they believed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:13-18), he replied joyously, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Now there can be no church without members, and this utterance of Jesus implies strongly that those who confess him are to be the members of his church, who shall work for him through it as a channel.

If there could be any doubt about the matter, it is all dissipated by the words of the Great Commission: "Jesus came unto them and spake unto them, saying,

All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28: 18-20.)

Every thinking man will see at once that this Commission can never be carried out without the church. To send out missionaries, to gather the necessary funds, to conduct campaigns of education, to maintain preaching services, to keep up the spirit of worship, all require the church. If believers in Jesus are not to be its members, who are?

A Summary of Argument.

These are the chief utterances and actions of Jesus himself bearing upon the question of church membership. Briefly summed up they are as follows: He was a member of the church himself, although it was not a perfect institution in his day; he submitted to its baptism that he might fulfill all righteousness; he attended its services regularly and paid his share for its support; he preached repentance from sin and belief in the gospel of God, which was the study of his life and service and redemptive work; he demanded the keeping of all the commandments and, for the fullest life, the putting away of worldly things and the rendering of service to the poor and needy. His founding the church upon the confession of his disciples that he is the Christ, implies that the be-

lievers in him in every age are to be its members. Finally, there is the Great Commission, the carrying out of which demands that his followers organize themselves for the mighty task. All the words and acts of Jesus are on the assumption that all those who love him shall become a part of his visible body on earth, that is, the church.

Helpful Incidents in Apostolic Days.

An important contribution to the answer we are seeking is found in the case of Cornelius. After Peter had preached the full gospel to him and his household, when he had unmistakable evidences that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them, he said: "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10:47, 48.) The evidence that this whole company was taken into the church at once is that baptism is administered only by duly appointed officers of the church and only to those who knock at her doors for entrance.

Similar testimony appears in the case of the jailor of Philippi: "What must I do to be saved?" was his cry. The answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he [the jailor] took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately, and he brought them into his house, and set food be-

fore them and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." (Acts 16:30-34.) Here again the rite was administered that signified their entrance into full church membership.

Then there is the telling incident that occurred on the day of Pentecost. Peter had preached his powerful sermon. "They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. . . . And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved." (Acts 2:41, 47.)

Perhaps this is enough to make known the mind and will of Christ and the practices of Christians in the days when the church was being founded and the New Testament was in the making. From it all one may conclude that, while it is clearly the plan of Jesus that all who receive salvation by faith in him shall immediately unite with the church he established to enjoy its benefits and help carry on his work in saving the world, there is no direct command touching the matter, and it may be possible for one to be saved without joining the church.

On the other hand, it is perfectly clear from the incidents we have studied and the whole teaching of the Bible that no one can be saved without believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world; that repentance from sins is also necessary; that obeying the commandments and the teachings of Jesus is a vital element; that baptism as a symbol of inward cleansing by the Holy Spirit was administered to every believer; that all such believers

entered upon the life of the young church with great joy and would doubtless have considered it an unpardonable insult if anybody had suggested that they stay out.

A Further Word Should Be Said.

I have tried to answer this question as one honestly asked by a sincere and devout inquirer, but before I close the chapter there are one or two things which should be said:

Why one should want to be saved to spend eternity with God and not be identified with his work while here on earth is incomprehensible. We all feel with Dr. Watkinson that a sinner in the purity of heaven would be infinitely more miserable than a saint in hell.

Let us be honest and frank with each other. The question, "Is it necessary to belong to the church to be saved?" is not what most men mean when they ask it. They mean rather, "Can I not do just as I please while on earth, live a worldly life, pay no attention to God or sacred things, and still go to the realms of eternal joy when I have worn my body out by selfish and sinful living?"

Of course the answer must be an emphatic "No!" For, according to the message given to John concerning the City of God, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27.)

When some facetious individual taunted Mr.

Moody with the fact that the dying thief did not join the church, he replied quickly, "True, but he probably accepted the first invitation to become a Christian he ever received. Can the same be said of you?"

Finally, to ask to receive at last all the blessings of heaven without joining the church and working for the salvation of others while here on earth, is like taking a fortune and giving nothing in return; such an act is too selfish to have a place in well-meaning lives. God has opened a channel to heaven. To keep in the channel demands faith, and strongly calls for membership in the church of Jesus Christ. Everyone hoping to be saved needs the help of the church to live right. The church needs the help of every such soul properly to do her work in any community and in the world at large. "Let the redeemed of Jehovah say so," openly, frankly, in the church. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9.)

WHY DO CHURCH MEMBERS DO WRONG?

XII

WHY DO CHURCH MEMBERS DO WRONG?

An Honest Confession.

In the very first place, let us frankly acknowledge the fact. No sane church member to-day denies it. No sane man claims perfection. The report that we do, when actually we live in sin, comes from enemies and from those who think that a poor excuse for not doing what they know to be a duty is better than none.

Throughout all human history, God has used imperfect agents for doing his mighty work. Adam disobeyed the simple laws of God within a short time after his creation. Noah, chosen to preserve the race alive, was once brutally intemperate. Moses, through anger, forfeited an entrance into the Promised Land. David broke the seventh commandment, and then, to shield himself, the eighth. Peter was once profane and violently angry, and Paul in agony confessed: "To me who would do good, evil is present."

Nevertheless, the religious life of the world has been forever influenced and materially advanced by the services of these imperfect men. These men were human, and the men in the church to-day are human and so subject to error, but since the vast majority of church members are honest in the main trend and purpose of their lives, God uses them to his own glory and to the uplifting of other men.

Members of the church do wrong sometimes, not because they are members of the church, but because they are human beings, and no man has ever succeeded in living entirely free from sin, save that One only who lived as God would have all men live. Those who claim perfection are oftentimes most frail, disagreeable and unworthy. Spurgeon said he met one perfect man, and ever afterward prayed the Lord to spare him a repetition of the experience.

A Wrong Idea of the Church Corrected.

There is no disposition in our minds either to deny the fact that church members sometimes do wrong, or to excuse them for so doing. Such transgression is entirely out of harmony with their profession and with the pure principles of the church. The purpose of this chapter is not to defend transgressors, but to treat the subject of their transgressions from the standpoint of those who say they are kept out of the church in consequence of them.

Clearly, many men have a wrong idea of the church as it exists in the world to-day. It is not a group of saints, sitting with folded hands lest they soil their garments by contact with the world, but an army fighting sin in their own lives and in the world.

Once, while upon earth, Christ was severely criticised for mingling intimately with publicans and sinners. Knowing their thoughts, he forever settled the question of his mission in those stirring words, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5: 32.) Again he said, "If any

man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which goeth astray?" (Matthew 18: 12.) A true church is a group of God's agents going out to win sinners and persuade them to live honest, honorable lives.

The Church Takes Chances in the Hope of Saving.

As the church urges human beings to join her ranks and work in the cause of righteousness, she is generous in her reception of them. An able servant of the Master [1] has recently pointed out these facts: Children come and ask admission to the church, and while she knows that she runs a risk in taking them before the years of maturity have been reached, yet, with her strong arms and stronger faith in the power of God to save, she welcomes them, taking the risk of future transgression. She extends her arms also to the uninstructed, and, on their confession of faith in the Saviour, gladly receives them into her membership. Sometimes these crude lives do violence to the sacred traditions of the church before they can be molded into the pure and harmonious form of the saints, but will any man say that for that reason the church should not receive them? She pleads with the imperfect to give their hearts to God and, upon their confession and repentance, gladly welcomes them among her members, anxious to help them with the struggle towards righteous living in which every member of the church is likewise engaged.

[1] Charles E. Jefferson, in "Things Fundamental."

You who are so zealous for the purity of the church, what terms would you propose for the reception of members? Would you demand absolute perfection? And if this thought has been in your minds, let me ask you this other question: "Under such circumstances, how rapidly would the church advance, and how soon would she be able to accomplish the great work which has been committed to her care?" The business of the church is not to watch herself all the time lest a speck of dust settle on her garments, it is to reach into the fire and save brands from burning, and into the water and save men from drowning. The church must be all things to all men that she may by all means save some.

Four Charges of Hypocrisy Sifted.

A man with a few flaws in him is worth more than a post that is perfect. Hypocrisy is abominable wherever it is found, and no more so in the church than in society or business. When it can be proven that a member is hypocritical, the church feels far worse about it than does the world. But in the vast majority of cases, it will be found that the most serious charges of hypocrisy have no foundation in fact. I have heard four prominent church members called hypocrites, and I have taken occasion to sift these charges to the bottom. The first man is merely thrifty in his business affairs. In the second case, the ground of disapproval was proven to be not so much the man's action as his nationality. The third man, loudly proclaimed a hypocrite, once loaned a

sum of money, and when it was two years overdue, collected it by force of law. The fourth took the position that, before being punished for an alleged crime, every man is entitled to a fair trial by a court of his peers. It was further revealed that these four men had done more for their community and the section of the state in which they lived than any twenty men who cast aspersions upon the sincerity of their religious professions. The charge of hypocrisy against church members usually arises from one of two things: personal dislike, or a desire for an excuse to escape doing what the complainant knows he ought to do.

Charging Others with Wrongdoing Will Not Save You.

But how are we to treat those in the church who are guilty of wrongdoing? Are we to cast them out? A similar question was once put to the Saviour, the Founder of our religion. With quick response, he said: "No, let wheat and tares grow together until the harvest. God will make the separation and there will be no mistakes in judgment." (Matt. 13: 24-30.) A great preacher once asked this very practical question: "If a man honestly cares for Christ, what difference does it make to him that another dishonestly pretends to?"

If every other man did wrong, you could belong to the church and do right—at least, so nearly right that both God and man would approve your actions.

This is a personal matter. If you get into heaven,

it will not be because you refused to unite with the church because there were those in the church you considered hypocrites, but because of your own right relation with God. "If I will that he tarry till I come," said Jesus in answer to Peter's impertinent question concerning John, "what is that to thee? follow thou me." (John 21:22.) Just as some men say: "I will tell the truth though all other men are liars," so it is yours to say: "Though all other men prove false, I will be true to God, to myself and to my fellow-men." When you get a little nearer to your God, it probably will be revealed to you that there are several thousand other men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

The Large Service of an Imperfect Church.

Before we condemn the whole church for the sins of a few members and say we will not give our hearts to Christ and unite with his church until she has cast out all hypocrites, let us look beyond our own little community and our own brief age, and see whether or not the organization has done anything for the world that merits support. The church of Jesus Christ found the race on its lowest moral plane. Unabashed at the herculean task, she set about lifting men up to the perfect standards of God. In nineteen hundred years she has so raised the moral tone of society that should one of the least offensive of old Rome's orgies be introduced into the White House at Washington, the whole world would be shocked

and America would immediately set about cleansing herself from the iniquity.

All fair-minded men confess that this uplift is due to the church. Commerce, accompanied as it always is in new territory by whisky, opium, gambling and kindred evils, only tends to sink men deeper into sin. But the church also attends commerce, and, although the odds are generally against her in the beginning, in some way she wins out, and everywhere she is gradually lifting men up to God.

The church is the only organization on earth that seeks the allegiance of men solely for their own good; the only organization that gives its whole effort to the development of the only part of us that lives beyond the grave; the only organization to which have been committed the revelation and ordinances of God.

Some of her members may do wrong, none claim perfection, but notwithstanding this, the church is the visible body of Christ among men, and the great bulk of her membership is true to him, living righteously, relieving suffering, comforting the sorrowing and carrying the glad tidings to every nation under heaven.

Is not such a church, even though she may not claim perfection, worthy of your allegiance and support?

WOULD IT BE RIGHT FOR ME TO UNITE
WITH THE CHURCH BEFORE I AM
SURE I COULD REMAIN
FAITHFUL?

XIII

WOULD IT BE RIGHT FOR ME TO UNITE WITH THE CHURCH BEFORE I AM SURE I COULD REMAIN FAITHFUL?

The Position of Many Honest Men.

It is the disposition of all honest men to be sure of themselves before they act. Particularly are they careful when the matter under consideration is religious. They scorn hypocrisy in every form, and least of all do they want it to be found in them by reason of any pretense of virtue they do not possess. Therefore, when urged to unite with the church, many conscientiously hold back, asking the question: "Would it be right for me to join the church until I am sure I could remain faithful to all the church stands for? Would I not be a weight upon the church, dragging her down instead of a helper lifting her up?" So, feeling that they are right upon the matter, many men, making an honest effort to do right, persistently absent themselves from church and from all religious gatherings, arguing with themselves that when they have lived righteously long enough, they will seek relationship with some body of believers. It is to those who take this posi-

tion honestly, and not as an excuse for not doing what they know they ought to do, that the following words are directed.

Man's Response to the Social Instinct.

Man is essentially a social being. From the very beginning men have sought the companionship of their kind, and this characteristic,—to which no man can do violence without injury to himself,—reaches over to the life of the twentieth century. In a double and very particular sense: "It is not good for man to be alone." For most men, solitude is unsafe. "Now and then," says Emerson, in "Society and Solitude," "a man exquisitely made may live alone, but coop up most men, and you undo them." We agree with Milton that "Solitude is sometimes best society," but most of us would make the plea of Cowper:

> "How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude.
> But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
> Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet."

However determined we may be not to have associates, we will find this difficult indeed, and—to most of us,—it will be impossible. We will associate with somebody; if not with those who love righteousness, then with those who prefer the way of the world; if not with the church, then with some stratum of what the age is pleased to call society.

When Social Companionship Proves Insufficient.

In the social world, so long as everybody stands firm and lives up to the moral standards the age has set, this association may seem sufficient, for it will tend by its very restrictions to keep all its members up to its own altitude. But when one in society falls, what then? How does modern society treat the man or the woman, who—tempted beyond power to resist—yields?

The most striking incident in my memory of the great Talmage is his description of the scene attending a young woman who had fallen from the lofty heights of purity into the waves of sin and dissipation. He pictured her as struggling in an engulfing sea. Conscious of her transgressions, penitent to the point of tears, she struggled to keep her head above the waves and finally was able to reach up with trembling hand, grasp the rock and strive to draw herself up again upon a footing of respectability; but society, remembering only her sin, unmindful of her penitence, in heartlessness and anger, trampled the tender fingers clinging to the rock and beat the struggling woman back into the waves. This picture of society's attitude toward all those who fall proves conclusively that every struggling man should have the association of those whose hearts are more sympathetic and generous than the hearts of the men and women who make up the bulk of modern society.

The writer of Ecclesiastes (chapter 4: 10) cries: "Woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up." How often we have

seen one who, though fallen in the estimation of his own friends, weakened by dissipation, scorning himself and the weakness that leads him to further indulgence, yet in a moment of determination decides that he will reform, that he will stop his evil practices, that he will purify his life, and that when he has again made himself respectable, and has lived right a length of time sufficient to insure its permanency, he will join himself to good society and unite with the church. The determination is worthy indeed, and we rejoice in it, but—knowing the weakness of human flesh and the temptation that the evil of the world can bring against the struggler—our hearts are anxious for him and with eagerness we plead with him to surround himself with such helps as will stand by him in the hour of trial. Refusing all such offers he meets the temptations of his former life alone. Successful for a time, the old appetites at last overcome him and we see him engulfed in the old passions and falling deeper than ever into his old sins. "Woe unto him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up."

The Help God Has Provided for Strugglers.

The church of Jesus Christ was given to the world to be an organization of strength, not only to those who are able to maintain the high standards of life set forth by the Gospels, but to those also who are struggling to attain those standards, but find themselves weak with the weakness of human flesh. The church is the world's tower of strength. Not only

is she strong enough to stand alone, but, with surplus of strength, it is her privilege to help the weak, to reach forth powerful arms and lift the multitude up to the level of her purity and power to serve. Like a great life boat apparently full as it flies forth to the rescue, yet taking in half a hundred sinking men and casting lines to others to which they cling while the angel of deliverance moves rapidly towards the shore, the church of Jesus rides upon the waves of life's ocean, carrying all who trust in him to the harbor of safety, extending arms of strength to those unable to lift themselves entirely above the flood, but anxious to be in touch with him who is the Saviour of the world.

If you believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, and are sincere in your expressed desire to live as near him as the weakness of the flesh will permit, it would be right for you to join the church while you are still struggling.

A Helpful Illustration.

In a church in northern Illinois there was a member given to the use of intoxicating liquor. Most of the time he was able to control himself in his indulgence, but at other times appetite would overcome his better judgment and he would drink to the point of beastly intoxication. Many a time the session of that church considered this unfortunate man's case. Constantly the opinion grew stronger that he was a detriment to the cause of Christ, and that, since he per-

sisted in his transgression, he ought to be cast out. The pastor pleaded for him evening after evening as his case was considered, knowing the genuineness of the man' endeavor better than any other member of the church's session. Finally, when the elders would endure his transgression no longer and were determined upon final action, the pastor turned to the sixth chapter of Galatians and read the first verse: "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." That Scripture was like a lightning flash in a cloud. It cleared the atmosphere in an instant, precipitating the wrong and revealing the spirit of Christ.

"Looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted!" Perhaps the most tragic event in Christ's earthly ministry outside of the events attending his own crucifixion, was the bringing into his presence, by many of those who pretended to follow the teachings of the sacred writings, of a poor woman caught in the toils of temptation and dragged to the very depths of human sin. Looking upon this broken human life, now all penitence and tears, and then upon the faces of the crowd of men who had brought her to him, faces hard with hatred and personal transgression, the words instantly sprang to his lips: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The narrative goes on: "And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst." Then with

that tenderness which Christ always used as he spoke to women, he said: "Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." John 8: 1-11.

What the Church Says to Honestly Striving Men.

In the spirit of Christ, the church thus holds out her heart of love and arms of helpfulness to those who are struggling against sin, trying to lift themselves up to the standards of righteousness. To all who are striving to do right she says: "There is no reason why you should make this whole fight alone; we too are striving as you are striving. Join yourself with us, surround yourself with every righteousness known among men, take a clear, unquestioned stand with the people of God. The benefits of righteous association are yours, and it is the will of the Father that you take advantage of them to the full."

It is the old and honored principle of the life-preserver. When in danger on the sea, no man hesitates to take advantage of this timely provision. Nay, only he is considered wise who takes this advantage when it is offered him.

But it is vastly important that the life-preserver be a safe one. The memory of the Slocum disaster in the East River, New York, is still fresh in our minds. In vision we can see scores of struggling women and children not buoyed up, but dragged down into watery graves by the faulty and iron-loaded shams sold by unscrupulous men to the ship owners. Trust the old, time-honored, time-tried church of the living God as

your life-preserver. She has never failed a man who has honestly put his faith in her power to sustain, and toward all men, struggling in the waves of sin, she generously opens wide her strong arms and invites them to come in.

HOW MUCH CAN WE KNOW OF A FUTURE LIFE?

XIV

HOW MUCH CAN WE KNOW OF A FUTURE LIFE?

The Hope That Springs Eternal.

In no age has man been willing to believe that death is the end of his existence. In no grave is the earth packed so tight but that out of it rises an interrogation point. No death is so appalling but the very atmosphere around its couch is vibrant with hope.

Long before the Christian Scriptures confirmed the hope of the ages, men felt sure that another and brighter sun arose for the soul that closed its eyes upon the scenes of earth. What else could be the meaning of those wreaths of dainty immortelles the ancient Egyptians bound around the heads of the precious bodies they embalmed? What else the significance of the custom, well nigh universal among aboriginal peoples, of burying with their dead food, utensils and even weapons of warfare?

Cicero was but the mouthpiece for his age when he said: "There is, in the mind of man, a certain presentiment of immortality: and this takes the deepest root, and is the most discoverable, in the greatest geniuses and the most exalted souls."

Professor Tyndall, the English scientist, though he rejected revelation, yet said that in his highest moods the hope of immortality in him was strong.

Poets of all ages have had visions denied less sensitive souls, but their experience as they looked toward the future has been uniform. Lord Alfred Tennyson epitomized the aspiration of all when he wrote.

"And though from out this bourne of Time and Space
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to meet my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."

Even Ingersoll, who denied all revelation, said, as he stood by the open grave of his brother, "Here hope hears the rustle of a wing."

Can We Be Sure of Anything?

How much can we know about the future? Must it all be speculation? a pleasing hope? or are there facts which bear directly upon the problem and with which humanity may acquaint itself? It is this question, asked by men in every age and condition of life, with which this study has to do.

When Jesus was instituting what we now call "the Lord's Supper" (Matthew 26:26-29), he used a phrase that sets our hearts tingling with hope. After the bread had been given to his disciples as the symbol of his broken body, he took a cup and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. But I

say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Jesus Christ was not an idle jester. When he said a thing it had deep significance. Had he said nothing else on this subject, this last sentence would tell men that there is a future life and that this life is to be spent with God.

How vastly man needs the sustaining power of a living hope in the joys of heaven! "How," one noble soul cries; "how can you bear the infirmities of life, the sufferings of the body, and the chafing of the soul, which it is impossible to escape here below? These things are so many light-fingered robbers, that filch perpetually something of our being; and, if I have nothing but this life, spare me from it. But oh, if I have another life; if God is mine; if heaven is mine; if all the noble redeemed in heaven are my elder brethren; if every step here is carrying me nearer home, what to me are burdens and troubles? To me the proofs of a future life are so abundant, so positive, that I cannot doubt."

Answering the question, how much can we know of a future life, we can say confidently: "All that the Bible reveals." Aside from giving the brief references already made to the universal hope, I shall not attempt to prove the fact of a future life to those who do not believe the plain statements of the Bible. Those who demand proof of a future life apart from these sacred writings are in the untenable position of a man who would say: "I wish to know all law;

but do not ask me to believe the statements of the law books"; or of him who would say: "I wish to know all about the art of healing; but do not ask me to accept the principles laid down in books on medicine and hygiene."

The question of a future life is a religious question. If there is one, it will be spent with God in a spiritual realm. The Bible is the only book given to answer the religious questions of the race. If its information is rejected, then man can know nothing positively about the future, for no other book offers anything more than speculation or expressions of hope on this vital and all-absorbing theme.

The New Testament Proclaims a Future Life.

No man who accepts the New Testament as a revelation of God's will and plan, can doubt for a moment the fact of a future life or the nature of it. All has been written out so plainly that the most casual reader may know the facts. Extensive information concerning this most vital of all themes has been given in large letters. The catchwords are, "My Father's house," "The resurrection of the just," "The righteous shall go unto life eternal."

The Position Jesus Took.

The attitude of the Master toward the question of a future life was the same as that taken toward all the other great mysteries he came to tell men about. It was an attitude of constant assumption. He did not stop to explain all about it; his position was

rather: "Of course there is a future life. Who would question it? My whole plan of redemption is based on the fact. What am I saving men to, if not to eternal life in the kingdom of heaven?"

His most memorable utterance is that recorded by John, in the fourteenth chapter of his Gospel: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

No man who believes Jesus to be what he claimed to be will say for a moment that he would hold out such hope to the human soul if he did not know that it would be fulfilled to the letter. An honest man promises only what he can fulfill. No man would say for a moment that Jesus, occupying the position he did with relation to the Father, could be mistaken about the facts. If Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed One, then we need go no further. There is a future life, and the righteous are to spend it amidst all the felicities of the Father's home.

A Time of Recompense and Completions.

No man ever observed the injustices and inequalities of life more than Jesus. He watched with sympathetic heart the struggles of the underpaid laborer; the drudgery endured by the men and women who do the world's work; the impossibility of securing justice in courts of law; the beggarly returns society gives to her reformers and saviors. To all such he

was wont to say, in substance: "Never mind, there is a better day coming for you; a day when these wrongs will be righted; when judgments will be given without prejudice and without error; when mercy shall be on the throne; when work uncompleted here shall be finished and when merited rewards shall be bestowed." He even went so far as to urge men not to seek recompense in this life. Luke records (chapter 14:13, 14) that on one occasion when he was rebuking unworthy social ambitions he said: "But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

The Master himself was totally indifferent to earthly glories or emoluments. What to him were the things which perish with the using, when just beyond the gates of death lay the world of recompense, where no smallest deed done in God's name would be forgotten, where all wrongs would be righted, where his cup of joy would be full?

Paul Also Sure of the Future.

In addition to the many words concerning a future life which Jesus uttered with such clearness and confidence, we have much from the pen of the most prolific of all New Testament writers, the Apostle Paul. In his first letter to the Thessalonians (chapter 4: 13-18), he says confidently: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall

asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

That Paul had no doubt about a future life for himself, of endless joy and peace in the presence of the Saviour, is clear from many utterances. Hear this one from the letter to the Philippians (chapter 1: 23, 24): "But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake." To depart this life and be with Christ is far better! Here was a man who knew, if any living man ever did, what he might expect after death. To him were given visions and messages vouchsafed to few of the children of men. In writing he drew from these rich experiences, from his certain knowledge, and the sum of his inspired message is: "There is a blessed eternal life beyond the grave for every man who will accept the redemption purchased for him by Jesus Christ."

Philosophy Accords with Revelation.

It is interesting at times to lift one's eyes from revelation and rest them upon the thought and feeling of earth's greatest men. John Fiske was no sentimentalist. Each fact must be demonstrable and accord with reason to win his acknowledgment. It means much to twentieth century men to hear the great scientist say:

"Does death end all? Has all this work been done for nothing? Is it all ephemeral, a bubble that bursts, a vision that fades? On such a view the riddle of the universe becomes a riddle without meaning. The more thoroughly we comprehend the process of evolution by which things have come to be what they are, the more we are likely to feel that to deny the everlasting persistence of the spiritual element in man is to rob the whole process of its meaning. For my own part, therefore, I believe in the immortality of the soul, not in the sense in which I accept the demonstrable truths of science, but as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work."

The Nature of the Kingdom.

All men, in all conditions of life, seem to have had the conviction that the life which is to come is not to be material. Such a speech as Hamlet's epitomizes the thought and dread of all:

"To die, to sleep;
To sleep; perchance to dream; aye, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause."

But against the further thought of such a drama, that the existence is to be ghostly, the mind rebels. No man is willing to entertain the idea that his spirit, released from the flesh, shall be doomed to walk through the night, until the evils committed in his days on earth are burned and purged away.

There must be something better than this, and with anticipations born of happy experiences in the past, we fly to the revelation of God. Paul sets the mind at rest, in a measure, by his assertion that there are "celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial," and terminates all question by further declaring (I Corinthians 15:40, 50-54): "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. . . . we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

In face of such heartening declarations from the lips of one divinely inspired to reveal the truth, man refuses to believe the theories of ancient philosophy that life issues from the activity of the body as the flame of a candle issues from the consumption of tallow, and, like it, goes out when the material fails. The revelation made definite and full by the Saviour

that God is a Spirit, declares to us that we, his children, are also spirits, inhabiting for a time a house of clay, from whose limitations we are all in time to be released, that the undying part of us may abide with him forevermore.

Listen to the exultant cry of Paul in Romans 8: 16, 17: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him."

In the eye of the law, joint-heirs have share and share alike in any inheritance. Do we dare to follow the declaration to its logical conclusion? All that there is in the Father's house for Christ there is for those that are his—the same kind and measure. Here is enough to set a live man's heart throbbing and make him eager so to confess his faith and order his life that the Master will be willing to say of him at the judgment, "Father, this is one of your children, born into your spiritual kingdom in the way you prescribed, and so a joint-heir with me of whatever joy you may have for us in your eternal home."

His Kingdom Is an Everlasting Kingdom.

The transitoriness of all earthly homes makes the heart of man long for something permanent and unchanging in the future. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said what all men feel when he cried: "For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek

after the city which is to come." (Hebrews 13:14.) As he wrote of the faith of Jacob, he said: "By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, [booths made of tree boughs; a most temporary shelter] . . . for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:9, 10.)

A city which hath foundations! A permanent city, as against the booths of the wilderness! A city that is eternal! Strange that it is so difficult for man to grasp the stretch of eternity! In an effort to bring it before the minds of a company of men, one long ago used the figure of a sparrow carrying the entire earth, particle by particle, all the way to Uranus and then carrying it all back again. After the process had been repeated a million times, he said, it would still be only in the morning of eternity!

The kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom. The Scriptures abound with declarations which cannot be misunderstood. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16.)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life." (John 5:24.)

"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive

manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life." (Luke 18:29, 30.)

Matthew records (Matthew 25:31-46) that, in his closing lessons, Jesus drew a sharp picture of the general judgment when he should come in his glory and gather before him all that ever dwelt upon the earth. There would be a clear distinction between the good and the bad, the good being placed on the right side, the bad on his left. Each would have his place according to his deeds while on earth. A distinct note of sadness appears in the Saviour's utterance as he declared that the One on the throne would be obliged to confess the facts, hard as they might be, while his voice was a wail as he cried, "These shall go away into eternal punishment:" but a note of triumph when he added, "But the righteous into eternal life."

However much man may question concerning the measure of the future life, the Bible has no such note. Just as time means time, eternity means eternity, and the man who can understand the one can understand the other. The future life is to be spiritual, and it is to be without end. That which is permanent in man here is to abide there in everlasting glory.

What of Progress in the Future?

The question of possible progression in the future life has not been clearly touched upon by the Scriptures. There are strong arguments for the belief that we shall continue to grow throughout the ages, provided our angle is right when we enter heaven. On one thing, however, the Bible is clear. There is

no probation after death: no chance to correct our course, and get our sins forgiven. Abundant opportunity for that is given us while on earth—if we desire it. If we persistently and finally reject the mercy of God, we take the consequences of our rejection into the future. Such passages as these leave no doubt on this point:

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Sheol whither thou goest." (Ecclesiastes 9: 10.)

"And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is." (Revelation 22: 10-12.)

Further than this we have Christ's story of Dives and Lazarus. Each man abode in the place and condition for which his earthly faith and conduct fitted him.

Clearly, there is to be no opportunity to change the course of our life after death, but the whole scheme of God's kingdom awakens and stimulates the hope that, once started on the heavenly life, we shall go on from grace to grace and from victory to victory, until we are worthy a place at the right hand of God.

May We Know Our Friends in Heaven?

No more disquieting philosophy was ever advanced than that of the Positivists, which asserts that our individuality ceases at death and that, if righteous, we are absorbed into a kind of super-humanity or body of humanity, which is eternally happy and prosperous. While the idea is well-nigh incomprehensible to the average mind, it is also directly contrary to the plain statements of Scripture. Statement after statement declares that the personality of many saints of old remains as when upon earth.

At the transfiguration of our Lord there appeared to the astonished disciples both Moses and Elias, their personality unchanged after more than a thousand years in glory. (Matthew, chapter 17.)

Dives and Lazarus, each in his own place, were pictured by the Master as being not only the same personalities as when they lived among men, but as retaining many of their earthly peculiarities and characteristics. (Luke, chapter 16.)

Even more convincing are the words of the Master as he handed the cup to his disciples while instituting the Lord's Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The personality of the Master is to persist beyond the grave, as is also that of his disciples. Is it not a sane and reasonable deduction that if the personality of these persists, the personality of all men will

do the same? There are no freaks in God's kingdom. What one is, all are. When we enter the sacred portals of the City of God we shall know as we are known.

Let us not worry our heads about the difficulties in the way. God is not limited in his working. The things our finite minds cannot work out, he knows without effort, as a ripe scholar knows the alphabet. Joy and peace and the most delightful social intercourse are to be part of our life there. "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8: 11.)

"Friends will be there I have loved long ago,
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Saviour I know
Will through the ages be glory for me."

Sweet mothers will be there whom we,

"Have loved long since, and lost awhile."

Fathers will be there, gathering children in their arms as in earthly days. Husbands and wives will be united, while souls knit together by earthly love and communion will revel in spiritual intercourse forevermore.

There will be no disappointments in heaven. Once there, the omnipotence of God will do its perfect work. Every Christian should know this and, like

the Psalmist, cry out with confidence: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with beholding thy form." (Psalm 17: 15.)

Free from Sorrow, Pain and Death.

All this makes the heart leap and the tears of joy flow fast. But beyond all this, there is more to be said. The future life is to be free from the distresses that are so common in our earthly life. John, the beloved disciple, had a vision of the City of God and heard a voice of infinite sweetness which said: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away." (Revelation 21: 3, 4.)

It is worth striving for, do you not think, to reach a time and a place where life will be free from fleshly distresses? No hurried summoning of the physician! No agonizing moments of waiting for the change for the better so slow in coming! No farewells that tear the heart strings and leave one little better than dead! Sweet as life is to many of us, when the glories of that life are fully realized we have the feeling of Paul, that it is hard to wait the release from earth. If we were to consider ourselves only, we should like much to depart and be with Christ.

Life cannot come to full fruition amidst the adverse

surroundings of earth. One feels the force of Beecher's illustration of the vine planted in far-off Labrador by the faithful missionary. At the beginning of every short summer he set it out in the scant soil of the frost-bitten rocks and nurtured it with a parent's fidelity. Every autumn, before the killing blasts came, he took it up and kept it alive by his own scanty fire. But in ten years the vine grew to be only three or four feet high and never showed a sign of bud or blossom or cluster. The soil was too cold, the summer too short. At length the missionary was recalled to his native land. He took the vine, the pet of his leisure, brought it down into our southern latitudes and planted it. It was the same vine; it had the same root; but it was not the same sky over it. The great Brooklyn preacher broke into an ecstasy as he told of the change. "Look long, O Summer! Look warm, O Sun! Search and find where the hidden springs in the vine are. Behold, how it begins to shoot up! See what a stately growth it is having! Look at the branch upon branch which it is throwing out! Observe the smell in the air! See the blossoms, and after the blossoms, the clusters which the autumn shall see, hanging impurpled and ripened! But it took another soil and another sun to produce it. It never would have reached that state in Labrador."

How poor a thing life must seem to the man who sees nothing beyond the grave, or even to the man who is uncertain about the future! The toil, the struggle, the sorrow and then—the dark! It cannot be! It is not like God. It is not like nature. It is

against the thoughts of the mind and the hopes of the heart. There is a future life. "All nature cries aloud through all her works." The revelation of God peals it forth. The Son of God came down from heaven to make it sure that man should not miss the way. With tenderness and unquestionable authority he cries out to all men: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28.)

Let us put these truths from the revelation of God deep down in our hearts. Let us say daily to our own souls: "It is true. This life is but school time for the larger, better life that is to come." Then let us go on bravely, bearing what has to be borne, enjoying what there is to enjoy, leading others to know the truth, but all the time keeping our heart fixed upon the certainty that it will soon be over and we shall enter into the joy of our Lord. "Come, Lord Jesus!"

WHO, THEN, CAN BE SAVED?

XV

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The Possibility of Salvation.

A very dramatic incident in the life of Christ had just occurred. A rich, prominent and highly moral young man had prostrated himself before Jesus and asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus had replied, "Keep the commandments." "All these things have I observed," said the young man. Then, implying that in spite of this negative goodness he was not satisfied, he asked further, "What lack I yet?" Jesus was deeply moved. Here was a rare man indeed. With joy in his heart the Master exclaimed: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." (Matthew 19: 21.)

A cloud overshadowed the young man's face. He was rich, and like all rich Orientals, was proud of the fact. Jesus had asked too much. He turned and went away sorrowing. Grievously disappointed, Jesus used the figure of the camel and the needle's eye, saying: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Upon this the disciples asked the question we are here discussing: "Then who can be saved?" and Jesus gave the an-

swer that solves difficulties in every life, in every realm. "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God." (Mark 10: 17-27.)

From the beginning of time men who have been entirely honest with themselves have known and have declared that, so far as any goodness of their own was concerned, they were not worthy of a home in heaven. They have acknowledged the truth of Portia's declaration:

"In the course of justice none of us should see salvation."

The sense of sin is universal. Travelers find members of the most primitive tribes offering sacrifices for sin, while in the life of earth's greatest sons, in the form of penitence and prayer, the same thing is being done. The more refined the soul, the keener the sense of unworthiness. The centurion in whom Jesus found greater faith than in the most religious Jews, said as he urged the Master to cure his valued servant with a word, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." (Matthew 8: 5-13.) While John the Baptist, saint among saints, than whom, said the Saviour, a greater had never been born, drew back when Jesus came to him for baptism, saying: "I have need to be baptized of thee." (Matthew 3: 13-17.)

Modern men are apt to say: "I know I am not living right, that I ought to stop doing many of the

things I am doing, and make preparation for the future, but I do not know how. I have kept my eyes riveted on business, I have given no thought to religious matters. I even fear that I have sinned away my day of grace. How can a man of my type be saved?"

Have You Forgotten God's Power?

Such an inquirer should be reminded of the words of Jesus quoted above, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God." All things! That includes the saving of your soul, does it not? When God can save and make rare saints of drunkards like John B. Gough and H. H. Hadley, thieves like John Callahan and Harry Monroe, and libertines like Jerry McAuley and his companions, he can save a man in your position, can he not?

But the best part of all is that not only is God able to save you, not only is he willing, but he is eager to save you. Yes, he is ready to reach down his hand as you read this page and save you for eternity. All hindrances have been removed, all obstacles swept aside. The story of the broadening out of God's plan is fascinating. How we, the Gentiles, came to be included in the number of those to whom the gospel is to be made known is a story that interests every man.

Gentiles Knock at the Door of the Kingdom.

In the beginning God separated unto himself a people and revealed himself to them in almost unlimited

measure. We know now that his purpose was to fix in their hearts his message so firmly that it should never perish from the earth. When prepared, they were to be his messengers to the whole world. Like many another beneficiary, they misunderstood him and thought salvation was for them alone.

The time came when they must be shaken out of this belief. The Gentile world was knocking at the doors of the kingdom, and God was ready to open the doors. His earthly representatives, however, kept them tight shut, saying to all inquirers, "If you would be saved it must be through Judaism."

Then came to Peter, as he slept on the house top at Joppa, the vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the earth, and birds of the heaven, and the sound of a voice which said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean." The voice replied, "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common." Three times the vision was repeated and three times the voice was heard. When Peter awoke messengers were already at the gate calling him to the house of Cornelius, the pious Gentile of Cæsarea.

Greatly wondering, Peter responded to their call. What could all this mean? He was soon to know and declare the meaning, for when he reached the house of the Gentile and saw on every hand evidences of their acceptance by Christ he broke out: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him."

No respecter of persons! The outward countenance, the accident of birth or family, the material condition in which one may find himself—these things which mean so much to men, mean nothing to God. It is not the outward circumstances God respects, but the condition of the heart, and when any man's heart turns toward God he finds to his amazement that God's heart is already turned toward him and that the plans for his redemption are complete. God is never taken by surprise; he is never unprepared.

But the thing most amazing to Peter, and the thing of most importance to us, was that, whereas in former times birth into the Jewish commonwealth was the most essential element in salvation, now belief in God and righteous living are the most essential. "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." (Acts 10: 35.)

Let a man fulfill these conditions: obey the two tables of the commandments,—the first four bearing or his attitude toward God and the last six on his attitude toward man,—and he is accepted with God. But man wants more than this, and Peter knew it. Man wants his sins forgiven. So the great Apostle rushed on to tell the waiting company of Jesus. He told them of his life of service, of his sacrifice and crucifixion, of his resurrection, and finally, "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43.)

The Gates Are Open Wide.

We are now at the very heart of Christianity, and it is a glowing heart. If any man wishes to be saved he can be. His very need is God's call to him to accept his salvation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16.) No matter how hard it may be for man to understand this, the fact remains. Your salvation has been provided for, and only waits your acceptance. God is ready. Are you?

The Depth of the Riches of Love.

A youth deserted and ran away from a widowed and needy mother. Thinking only of himself, he plunged into worldly pleasures and went down deep. He lost position after position, sank to the bottom and began to be in want. For the first time he thought of returning to his mother. She had for him at least a roof and a clean bed. So he arose and came to his mother. He arrived at the old home at midnight. He touched the latch and the door swung open, as if just waiting to welcome him. In a moment he was in his mother's arms, and her tears of joy were washing away the stains of his sin. When the first flush of welcome was over the son said: "Mother, how does it come the door was not locked at midnight? Some one might have come in and robbed or murdered you." And the trembling mother weeping for joy, said: "Son, that door has never once been locked since you went away. I knew you

would come back some day. I prayed so constantly and so fervently, I literally held out my arms for you to come in. I kept saying to myself, 'when he does come I want him to know he has been expected, so I will leave the door unlocked and place a light in the window.'"

Men, the light is in the window of heaven for you, and the door is never locked!

The mystery of God's willingness to save sinning men can be explained by one single word. Nothing in the realm of justice demands it, reason cannot solve it, philosophy is dumb before it. It can be explained only by the great and mighty word Love. God so loved men that he made every provision for their salvation.

No matter how much you may have been mystified in the past; no matter how faulty members of the church or her ministers may have been; no matter how deep down you may be in sin; no matter how impossible your salvation may seem to you, you may be saved if you wish to be. God has already done his part: will you do yours? Turn from your sins; confess the Saviour that you may be born from above, and then go on adding his virtues to your character till God calls you home. "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God." (John 1:12.)

THE END

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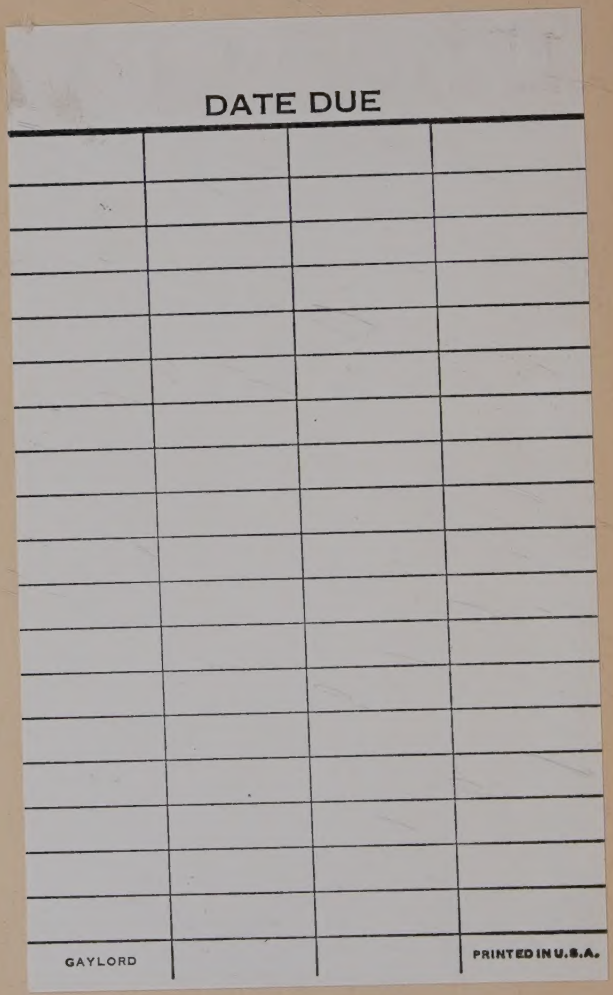

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